

PD STORIES BY MEN

MARCH 2019

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COUNTERPARTS

The bell rang furiously and, when Miss Parker went to the tube, a furious voice called out in a piercing North of Ireland accent:

“Send Farrington here!”

Miss Parker returned to her machine, saying to a man who was writing at a desk:

“Mr Alleyne wants you upstairs.”

The man muttered “Blast him!” under his breath and pushed back his chair to stand up. When he stood up he was tall and of great bulk. He had a hanging face, dark wine-coloured, with fair eyebrows and moustache: his eyes bulged forward slightly and the whites of them were dirty. He lifted up the counter and, passing by the clients, went out of the office with a heavy step.

He went heavily upstairs until he came to the second landing, where a door bore a brass plate with the inscription Mr Alleyne. Here he halted, puffing with labour and vexation, and knocked. The shrill voice cried:

“Come in!”

The man entered Mr Alleyne’s room. Simultaneously Mr Alleyne, a little man wearing gold-rimmed glasses on a clean-shaven face, shot his head up over a pile of documents. The head itself was so pink and hairless it seemed like a large egg reposing on the papers. Mr Alleyne did not lose a moment:

“Farrington? What is the meaning of this? Why have I always to complain of you? May I ask you why you haven’t made a copy of that contract between Bodley and Kirwan? I told you it must be ready by four o’clock.”

“But Mr Shelley said, sir——”

“Mr Shelley said, sir.... Kindly attend to what I say and not to what Mr Shelley says, sir. You have always some excuse or another for shirking work. Let me tell you that if the contract is not copied before this evening I’ll lay the matter before Mr Crosbie.... Do you hear me now?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you hear me now?... Ay and another little matter! I might as well be talking to the wall as talking to you. Understand once for all that you get a half an hour for your lunch and not an hour and a half. How many courses do you want, I’d like to know.... Do you mind me, now?”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr Alleyne bent his head again upon his pile of papers. The man stared fixedly at the polished skull which directed the affairs of Crosbie & Alleyne, gauging its fragility. A spasm of rage gripped his throat for a few moments and then passed, leaving after it a sharp sensation of thirst. The man recognised the sensation and felt that he must have a good night’s drinking. The middle of the month was passed and, if he could get the copy done in time, Mr Alleyne might give him an order on the cashier. He stood still, gazing fixedly at the head upon the pile of papers. Suddenly Mr Alleyne began to upset all the papers, searching for something. Then, as if he had been unaware of the man’s presence till that moment, he shot up his head again, saying:

“Eh? Are you going to stand there all day? Upon my word, Farrington, you take things easy!”

“I was waiting to see....”

“Very good, you needn’t wait to see. Go downstairs and do your work.”

The man walked heavily towards the door and, as he went out of the room, he heard Mr Alleyne cry after him that if the contract was not copied by evening Mr Crosbie would hear of the matter.

He returned to his desk in the lower office and counted the sheets which remained to be copied. He took up his pen and dipped it in the ink but he continued to stare stupidly at the last words he had written: In no case shall the said Bernard Bodley be.... The evening was falling and in a few minutes they would be lighting the gas: then he could write. He felt that he must slake the thirst in his throat. He stood up from his desk and, lifting the counter as before, passed out of the office. As he was passing out the chief clerk looked at him inquiringly.

“It’s all right, Mr Shelley,” said the man, pointing with his finger to indicate the objective of his journey.

The chief clerk glanced at the hat-rack but, seeing the row complete, offered no remark. As soon as he was on the landing the man pulled a shepherd’s plaid cap out of his pocket, put it on his head and ran quickly down the rickety stairs. From the street door he walked on furtively on the inner side of the path towards the corner and all at once dived into a doorway. He was now safe in the dark snug of

O'Neill's shop, and filling up the little window that looked into the bar with his inflamed face, the colour of dark wine or dark meat, he called out:

"Here, Pat, give us a g.p., like a good fellow."

The curate brought him a glass of plain porter. The man drank it at a gulp and asked for a caraway seed. He put his penny on the counter and, leaving the curate to grope for it in the gloom, retreated out of the snug as furtively as he had entered it.

Darkness, accompanied by a thick fog, was gaining upon the dusk of February and the lamps in Eustace Street had been lit. The man went up by the houses until he reached the door of the office, wondering whether he could finish his copy in time. On the stairs a moist pungent odour of perfumes saluted his nose: evidently Miss Delacour had come while he was out in O'Neill's. He crammed his cap back again into his pocket and re-entered the office, assuming an air of absent-mindedness.

"Mr Alleyne has been calling for you," said the chief clerk severely. "Where were you?"

The man glanced at the two clients who were standing at the counter as if to intimate that their presence prevented him from answering. As the clients were both male the chief clerk allowed himself a laugh.

"I know that game," he said. "Five times in one day is a little bit.... Well, you better look sharp and get a copy of our correspondence in the Delacour case for Mr Alleyne."

This address in the presence of the public, his run upstairs and the porter he had gulped down so hastily confused the man and, as he sat down at his desk to get what was required, he realised how hopeless was the task of finishing his copy of the contract before half past five. The dark damp night was coming and he longed to spend it in the bars, drinking with his friends amid the glare of gas and the clatter of glasses. He got out the Delacour correspondence and passed out of the office. He hoped Mr Alleyne would not discover that the last two letters were missing.

The moist pungent perfume lay all the way up to Mr Alleyne's room. Miss Delacour was a middle-aged woman of Jewish appearance. Mr Alleyne was said to be sweet on her or on her money. She came to the office often and stayed a long time when she came. She was sitting beside his desk now in an aroma of perfumes, smoothing the handle of her umbrella and nodding the great black feather in her hat. Mr Alleyne had swivelled his chair round to face her and thrown his right foot jauntily upon his left knee. The man put the correspondence on the desk and bowed respectfully but neither Mr Alleyne nor Miss Delacour took any notice

of his bow. Mr Alleyne tapped a finger on the correspondence and then flicked it towards him as if to say: "That's all right: you can go."

The man returned to the lower office and sat down again at his desk. He stared intently at the incomplete phrase: In no case shall the said Bernard Bodley be ... and thought how strange it was that the last three words began with the same letter. The chief clerk began to hurry Miss Parker, saying she would never have the letters typed in time for post. The man listened to the clicking of the machine for a few minutes and then set to work to finish his copy. But his head was not clear and his mind wandered away to the glare and rattle of the public-house. It was a night for hot punches. He struggled on with his copy, but when the clock struck five he had still fourteen pages to write. Blast it! He couldn't finish it in time. He longed to execrate aloud, to bring his fist down on something violently. He was so enraged that he wrote Bernard Bernard instead of Bernard Bodley and had to begin again on a clean sheet.

He felt strong enough to clear out the whole office singlehanded. His body ached to do something, to rush out and revel in violence. All the indignities of his life enraged him.... Could he ask the cashier privately for an advance? No, the cashier was no good, no damn good: he wouldn't give an advance.... He knew where he would meet the boys: Leonard and O'Halloran and Nosey Flynn. The barometer of his emotional nature was set for a spell of riot.

His imagination had so abstracted him that his name was called twice before he answered. Mr Alleyne and Miss Delacour were standing outside the counter and all the clerks had turn round in anticipation of something. The man got up from his desk. Mr Alleyne began a tirade of abuse, saying that two letters were missing. The man answered that he knew nothing about them, that he had made a faithful copy. The tirade continued: it was so bitter and violent that the man could hardly restrain his fist from descending upon the head of the manikin before him:

"I know nothing about any other two letters," he said stupidly.

"You—know—nothing. Of course you know nothing," said Mr Alleyne. "Tell me," he added, glancing first for approval to the lady beside him, "do you take me for a fool? Do you think me an utter fool?"

The man glanced from the lady's face to the little egg-shaped head and back again; and, almost before he was aware of it, his tongue had found a felicitous moment:

"I don't think, sir," he said, "that that's a fair question to put to me."

There was a pause in the very breathing of the clerks. Everyone was astounded (the author of the witticism no less than his neighbours) and Miss Delacour, who was a stout amiable person, began to smile broadly. Mr Alleyne flushed to the hue of a wild rose and his mouth twitched with a dwarf's passion. He shook his fist in the man's face till it seemed to vibrate like the knob of some electric machine:

“You impertinent ruffian! You impertinent ruffian! I'll make short work of you! Wait till you see! You'll apologise to me for your impertinence or you'll quit the office instant! You'll quit this, I'm telling you, or you'll apologise to me!”

He stood in a doorway opposite the office watching to see if the cashier would come out alone. All the clerks passed out and finally the cashier came out with the chief clerk. It was no use trying to say a word to him when he was with the chief clerk. The man felt that his position was bad enough. He had been obliged to offer an abject apology to Mr Alleyne for his impertinence but he knew what a hornet's nest the office would be for him. He could remember the way in which Mr Alleyne had hounded little Peake out of the office in order to make room for his own nephew. He felt savage and thirsty and revengeful, annoyed with himself and with everyone else. Mr Alleyne would never give him an hour's rest; his life would be a hell to him. He had made a proper fool of himself this time. Could he not keep his tongue in his cheek? But they had never pulled together from the first, he and Mr Alleyne, ever since the day Mr Alleyne had overheard him mimicking his North of Ireland accent to amuse Higgins and Miss Parker: that had been the beginning of it. He might have tried Higgins for the money, but sure Higgins never had anything for himself. A man with two establishments to keep up, of course he couldn't....

He felt his great body again aching for the comfort of the public-house. The fog had begun to chill him and he wondered could he touch Pat in O'Neill's. He could not touch him for more than a bob—and a bob was no use. Yet he must get money somewhere or other: he had spent his last penny for the g.p. and soon it would be too late for getting money anywhere. Suddenly, as he was fingering his watch-chain, he thought of Terry Kelly's pawn-office in Fleet Street. That was the dart! Why didn't he think of it sooner?

He went through the narrow alley of Temple Bar quickly, muttering to himself that they could all go to hell because he was going to have a good night of it. The clerk in Terry Kelly's said A crown! but the consignor held out for six shillings; and in the end the six shillings was allowed him literally. He came out of the pawn-office joyfully, making a little cylinder, of the coins between his thumb and fingers. In

Westmoreland Street the footpaths were crowded with young men and women returning from business and ragged urchins ran here and there yelling out the names of the evening editions. The man passed through the crowd, looking on the spectacle generally with proud satisfaction and staring masterfully at the office-girls. His head was full of the noises of tram-gongs and swishing trolleys and his nose already sniffed the curling fumes of punch. As he walked on he preconsidered the terms in which he would narrate the incident to the boys:

“So, I just looked at him—coolly, you know, and looked at her. Then I looked back at him again—taking my time, you know. ‘I don’t think that that’s a fair question to put to me,’ says I.”

Nosey Flynn was sitting up in his usual corner of Davy Byrne’s and, when he heard the story, he stood Farrington a half-one, saying it was as smart a thing as ever he heard. Farrington stood a drink in his turn. After a while O’Halloran and Paddy Leonard came in and the story was repeated to them. O’Halloran stood tailors of malt, hot, all round and told the story of the retort he had made to the chief clerk when he was in Callan’s of Fownes’s Street; but, as the retort was after the manner of the liberal shepherds in the eclogues, he had to admit that it was not as clever as Farrington’s retort. At this Farrington told the boys to polish off that and have another.

Just as they were naming their poisons who should come in but Higgins! Of course he had to join in with the others. The men asked him to give his version of it, and he did so with great vivacity for the sight of five small hot whiskies was very exhilarating. Everyone roared laughing when he showed the way in which Mr Alleyne shook his fist in Farrington’s face. Then he imitated Farrington, saying, “And here was my nabs, as cool as you please,” while Farrington looked at the company out of his heavy dirty eyes, smiling and at times drawing forth stray drops of liquor from his moustache with the aid of his lower lip.

When that round was over there was a pause. O’Halloran had money but neither of the other two seemed to have any; so the whole party left the shop somewhat regretfully. At the corner of Duke Street Higgins and Nosey Flynn bevelled off to the left while the other three turned back towards the city. Rain was drizzling down on the cold streets and, when they reached the Ballast Office, Farrington suggested the Scotch House. The bar was full of men and loud with the noise of tongues and glasses. The three men pushed past the whining match-sellers at the door and formed a little party at the corner of the counter. They began to exchange stories. Leonard introduced them to a young fellow named Weathers who was performing at the Tivoli as an acrobat and knockabout artiste. Farrington stood a drink all round. Weathers said he would take a small Irish and Apollinaris. Farrington, who had definite notions of what was what, asked the boys would they have an Apollinaris too; but the boys told Tim to make theirs hot. The talk became theatrical.

O'Halloran stood a round and then Farrington stood another round, Weathers protesting that the hospitality was too Irish. He promised to get them in behind the scenes and introduce them to some nice girls. O'Halloran said that he and Leonard would go, but that Farrington wouldn't go because he was a married man; and Farrington's heavy dirty eyes leered at the company in token that he understood he was being chaffed. Weathers made them all have just one little tincture at his expense and promised to meet them later on at Mulligan's in Poolbeg Street.

When the Scotch House closed they went round to Mulligan's. They went into the parlour at the back and O'Halloran ordered small hot specials all round. They were all beginning to feel mellow. Farrington was just standing another round when Weathers came back. Much to Farrington's relief he drank a glass of bitter this time. Funds were getting low but they had enough to keep them going. Presently two young women with big hats and a young man in a check suit came in and sat at a table close by. Weathers saluted them and told the company that they were out of the Tivoli. Farrington's eyes wandered at every moment in the direction of one of the young women. There was something striking in her appearance. An immense scarf of peacock-blue muslin was wound round her hat and knotted in a great bow under her chin; and she wore bright yellow gloves, reaching to the elbow. Farrington gazed admiringly at the plump arm which she moved very often and with much grace; and when, after a little time, she answered his gaze he admired still more her large dark brown eyes. The oblique staring expression in them fascinated him. She glanced at him once or twice and, when the party was leaving the room, she brushed against his chair and said "O, pardon!" in a London accent. He watched her leave the room in the hope that she would look back at him, but he was disappointed. He cursed his want of money and cursed all the rounds he had stood, particularly all the whiskies and Apollinaris which he had stood to Weathers. If there was one thing that he hated it was a sponge. He was so angry that he lost count of the conversation of his friends.

When Paddy Leonard called him he found that they were talking about feats of strength. Weathers was showing his biceps muscle to the company and boasting so much that the other two had called on Farrington to uphold the national honour. Farrington pulled up his sleeve accordingly and showed his biceps muscle to the company. The two arms were examined and compared and finally it was agreed to have a trial of strength. The table was cleared and the two men rested their elbows on it, clasping hands. When Paddy Leonard said "Go!" each was to try to bring down the other's hand on to the table. Farrington looked very serious and determined.

The trial began. After about thirty seconds Weathers brought his opponent's hand slowly down on to the table. Farrington's dark wine-coloured face flushed darker still with anger and humiliation at

having been defeated by such a stripling.

“You’re not to put the weight of your body behind it. Play fair,” he said.

“Who’s not playing fair?” said the other.

“Come on again. The two best out of three.”

The trial began again. The veins stood out on Farrington’s forehead, and the pallor of Weathers’ complexion changed to peony. Their hands and arms trembled under the stress. After a long struggle Weathers again brought his opponent’s hand slowly on to the table. There was a murmur of applause from the spectators. The curate, who was standing beside the table, nodded his red head towards the victor and said with stupid familiarity:

“Ah! that’s the knock!”

“What the hell do you know about it?” said Farrington fiercely, turning on the man. “What do you put in your gab for?”

“Sh, sh!” said O’Halloran, observing the violent expression of Farrington’s face. “Pony up, boys. We’ll have just one little smahan more and then we’ll be off.”

A very sullen-faced man stood at the corner of O’Connell Bridge waiting for the little Sandymount tram to take him home. He was full of smouldering anger and revengefulness. He felt humiliated and discontented; he did not even feel drunk; and he had only twopence in his pocket. He cursed everything. He had done for himself in the office, pawned his watch, spent all his money; and he had not even got drunk. He began to feel thirsty again and he longed to be back again in the hot reeking public-house. He had lost his reputation as a strong man, having been defeated twice by a mere boy. His heart swelled with fury and, when he thought of the woman in the big hat who had brushed against him and said Pardon! his fury nearly choked him.

His tram let him down at Shelbourne Road and he steered his great body along in the shadow of the wall of the barracks. He loathed returning to his home. When he went in by the side-door he found the kitchen empty and the kitchen fire nearly out. He bawled upstairs:

“Ada! Ada!”

His wife was a little sharp-faced woman who bullied her husband when he was sober and was bullied by him when he was drunk. They had five children. A little boy came running down the stairs.

“Who is that?” said the man, peering through the darkness.

“Me, pa.”

“Who are you? Charlie?”

“No, pa. Tom.”

“Where’s your mother?”

“She’s out at the chapel.”

“That’s right.... Did she think of leaving any dinner for me?”

“Yes, pa. I——”

“Light the lamp. What do you mean by having the place in darkness? Are the other children in bed?”

The man sat down heavily on one of the chairs while the little boy lit the lamp. He began to mimic his son’s flat accent, saying half to himself: “At the chapel. At the chapel, if you please!” When the lamp was lit he banged his fist on the table and shouted:

“What’s for my dinner?”

“I’m going ... to cook it, pa,” said the little boy.

The man jumped up furiously and pointed to the fire.

“On that fire! You let the fire out! By God, I’ll teach you to do that again!”

He took a step to the door and seized the walking-stick which was standing behind it.

“I’ll teach you to let the fire out!” he said, rolling up his sleeve in order to give his arm free play.

The little boy cried “O, pa!” and ran whimpering round the table, but the man followed him and caught him by the coat. The little boy looked about him wildly but, seeing no way of escape, fell upon his knees.

“Now, you’ll let the fire out the next time!” said the man striking at him vigorously with the stick. “Take that, you little whelp!”

The boy uttered a squeal of pain as the stick cut his thigh. He clasped his hands together in the air and his voice shook with fright.

“O, pa!” he cried. “Don’t beat me, pa! And I’ll ... I’ll say a Hail Mary for you.... I’ll say a Hail Mary for you, pa, if you don’t beat me.... I’ll say a Hail Mary....”

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Dubliners*, by James Joyce

A COLLEGE VAGABOND

The ease and apparent willingness with which some men revert to an aimless life can best be accounted for by the savage or barbarian instincts of our natures. The West has produced many types of the vagabond,--it might be excusable to say, won them from every condition of society. From the cultured East, with all the advantages which wealth and educational facilities can give to her sons, they flocked; from the South, with her pride of ancestry, they came; even the British Isles contributed their quota. There was something in the primitive West of a generation or more ago which satisfied them. Nowhere else could it be found, and once they adapted themselves to existing conditions, they were loath to return to former associations.

About the middle of the fifties, there graduated from one of our Eastern colleges a young man of wealthy and distinguished family. His college record was good, but close application to study during the last year had told on his general health. His ambition, coupled with a laudable desire to succeed, had buoyed up his strength until the final graduation day had passed.

Alexander Wells had the advantage of a good physical constitution. During the first year at college his reputation as an athlete had been firmly established by many a hard fought contest in the college games. The last two years he had not taken an active part in them, as his studies had required his complete attention. On his return home, it was thought by parents and sisters that rest and recreation would soon restore the health of this overworked young graduate, who was now two years past his majority. Two months of rest, however, failed to produce any improvement, but the family physician would not admit that there was immediate danger, and declared the trouble simply the result of overstudy, advising travel. This advice was very satisfactory to the young man, for he had a longing to see other sections of the country.

The elder Wells some years previously had become interested in western and southern real estate, and among other investments which he had made was the purchase of an old Spanish land grant on a stream called the Salado, west of San Antonio, Texas. These land grants were made by the crown of Spain to favorite subjects. They were known by name, which they always retained when changing ownership. Some of these tracts were princely domains, and were bartered about as though worthless, often changing owners at the card-table.

So when travel was suggested to Wells, junior, he expressed a desire to visit this family possession, and possibly spend a winter in its warm climate. This decision was more easily reached from the fact that there was an abundance of game on the land, and being a devoted sportsman, his own consent was secured in advance. No other reason except that of health would ever have gained the consent of his mother to a six months' absence. But within a week after reaching the decision, the young man had left New York and was on his way to Texas. His route, both by water and rail, brought him only within eighty miles of his destination, and the rest of the distance he was obliged to travel by stage.

San Antonio at this time was a frontier village, with a mixed population, the Mexican being the most prominent inhabitant. There was much to be seen which was new and attractive to the young Easterner, and he tarried in it several days, enjoying its novel and picturesque life. The arrival and departure of the various stage lines for the accommodation of travelers like himself was of more than passing interest. They rattled in from Austin and Laredo. They were sometimes late from El Paso, six hundred miles to the westward. Probably a brush with the Indians, or the more to be dreaded Mexican bandits (for these stages carried treasure--gold and silver, the currency of the country), was the cause of the delay. Frequently they carried guards, whose presence was generally sufficient to command the respect of the average robber.

Then there were the freight trains, the motive power of which was mules and oxen. It was necessary to carry forward supplies and bring back the crude products of the country. The Chihuahua wagon was drawn sometimes by twelve, sometimes by twenty mules, four abreast in the swing, the leaders and wheelers being single teams. For mutual protection trains were made up of from ten to twenty wagons. Drivers frequently meeting a chance acquaintance going in an opposite direction would ask, "What is your cargo?" and the answer would be frankly given, "Specie." Many a Chihuahua wagon carried three or four tons of gold and silver, generally the latter. Here was a new book for this college lad, one he had never studied, though it was more interesting to him than some he had read. There was something thrilling in all this new life. He liked it. The romance was real; it

was not an imitation. People answered his few questions and asked none in return.

In this frontier village at a late hour one night young Wells overheard this conversation: "Hello, Bill," said the case-keeper in a faro game, as he turned his head halfway round to see who was the owner of the monster hand which had just reached over his shoulder and placed a stack of silver dollars on a card, marking it to win, "I've missed you the last few days. Where have you been so long?"

"Oh, I've just been out to El Paso on a little pasear guarding the stage," was the reply. Now the little pasear was a continuous night and day round-trip of twelve hundred miles. Bill had slept and eaten as he could. When mounted, he scouted every possible point of ambush for lurking Indian or bandit. Crossing open stretches of country, he climbed up on the stage and slept. Now having returned, he was anxious to get his wages into circulation. Here were characters worthy of a passing glance.

Interesting as this frontier life was to the young man, he prepared for his final destination. He had no trouble in locating his father's property, for it was less than twenty miles from San Antonio. Securing an American who spoke Spanish, the two set out on horseback. There were several small ranchitos on the tract, where five or six Mexican families lived. Each family had a field and raised corn for bread. A flock of goats furnished them milk and meat. The same class of people in older States were called squatters, making no claim to ownership of the land. They needed little clothing, the climate being in their favor.

The men worked at times. The pecan crop which grew along the creek bottoms was beginning to have a value in the coast towns for shipment to northern markets, and this furnished them revenue for their simple needs. All kinds of game was in abundance, including waterfowl in winter, though winter here was only such in name. These simple people gave a welcome to the New Yorker which appeared sincere. They offered no apology for their presence on this land, nor was such in order, for it was the custom of the country. They merely referred to themselves as "his people," as though belonging to the land.

When they learned that he was the son of the owner of the grant, and that he wanted to spend a few months hunting and looking about, they considered themselves honored. The best jacal in the group was tendered him and his interpreter. The food offered was something new, but the relish with which his companion partook of it assisted young Wells in overcoming his scruples, and he ate a supper of dishes he had never tasted before. The coffee he declared was delicious.

On the advice of his companion they had brought along blankets. The

women of the ranchito brought other bedding, and a comfortable bed soon awaited the Americanos. The owner of the jacal in the mean time informed his guest through the interpreter that he had sent to a near-by ranchito for a man who had at least the local reputation of being quite a hunter. During the interim, while awaiting the arrival of the man, he plied his guest with many questions regarding the outside world, of which his ideas were very simple, vague, and extremely provincial. His conception of distance was what he could ride in a given number of days on a good pony. His ideas of wealth were no improvement over those of his Indian ancestors of a century previous. In architecture, the jacal in which they sat satisfied his ideals.

The footsteps of a horse interrupted their conversation. A few moments later, Tiburcio, the hunter, was introduced to the two Americans with a profusion of politeness. There was nothing above the ordinary in the old hunter, except his hair, eyes, and swarthy complexion, which indicated his Aztec ancestry. It might be in perfect order to remark here that young Wells was perfectly composed, almost indifferent to the company and surroundings. He shook hands with Tiburcio in a manner as dignified, yet agreeable, as though he was the governor of his native State or the minister of some prominent church at home. From this juncture, he at once took the lead in the conversation, and kept up a line of questions, the answers to which were very gratifying. He learned that deer were very plentiful everywhere, and that on this very tract of land were several wild turkey roosts, where it was no trouble to bag any number desired. On the prairie portion of the surrounding country could be found large droves of antelope. During drouthy periods they were known to come twenty miles to quench their thirst in the Salado, which was the main watercourse of this grant. Once Tiburcio assured his young patron that he had frequently counted a thousand antelope during a single morning. Then there was also the javeline or peccary which abounded in endless numbers, but it was necessary to hunt them with dogs, as they kept the thickets and came out in the open only at night. Many a native cur met his end hunting these animals, cut to pieces with their tusks, so that packs, trained for the purpose, were used to bay them until the hunter could arrive and dispatch them with a rifle. Even this was always done from horseback, as it was dangerous to approach the javeline, for they would, when aroused, charge anything.

All this was gratifying to young Wells, and like a congenial fellow, he produced and showed the old hunter a new gun, the very latest model in the market, explaining its good qualities through his interpreter. Tiburcio handled it as if it were a rare bit of millinery, but managed to ask its price and a few other questions. Through his companion, Wells then engaged the old hunter's services for the following day; not that he expected to hunt, but he wanted to acquaint himself with the boundaries of the land and to become familiar with the surrounding

country. Naming an hour for starting in the morning, the two men shook hands and bade each other good-night, each using his own language to express the parting, though neither one knew a word the other said. The first link in a friendship not soon to be broken had been forged.

Tiburcio was on hand at the appointed hour in the morning, and being joined by the two Americans they rode off up the stream. It was October, and the pecans, they noticed, were already falling, as they passed through splendid groves of this timber, several times dismounting to fill their pockets with nuts. Tiburcio frequently called attention to fresh deer tracks near the creek bottom, and shortly afterward the first game of the day was sighted. Five or six does and grown fawns broke cover and ran a short distance, stopped, looked at the horsemen, and then capered away.

Riding to the highest ground in the vicinity, they obtained a splendid view of the stream, outlined by the foliage of the pecan groves that lined its banks as far as the eye could follow either way. Tiburcio pointed out one particular grove lying three or four miles farther up the creek. Here he said was a cabin which had been built by a white man who had left it several years ago, and which he had often used as a hunting camp in bad weather. Feeling his way cautiously, Wells asked the old hunter if he were sure that this cabin was on and belonged to the grant. Being assured on both points, he then inquired if there was anything to hinder him from occupying the hut for a few months. On the further assurance that there was no man to dispute his right, he began plying his companions with questions. The interpreter told him that it was a very common and simple thing for men to batch, enumerating the few articles he would need for this purpose.

They soon reached the cabin, which proved to be an improvement over the ordinary jacal of the country, as it had a fireplace and chimney. It was built of logs; the crevices were chinked with clay for mortar, its floor being of the same substance. The only Mexican feature it possessed was the thatched roof. While the Americans were examining it and its surroundings, Tiburcio unsaddled the horses, picketing one and hobbling the other two, kindled a fire, and prepared a lunch from some articles he had brought along. The meal, consisting of coffee, chipped venison, and a thin wafer bread made from corn and reheated over coals, was disposed of with relish. The two Americans sauntered around for some distance, and on their return to the cabin found Tiburcio enjoying his siesta under a near-by pecan tree.

Their horses refreshed and rested, they resaddled, crossing the stream, intending to return to the ranchito by evening. After leaving the bottoms of the creek, Tiburcio showed the young man a trail made by the javeline, and he was surprised to learn that an animal with so small a foot was a dangerous antagonist, on account of its gregarious nature. Proceeding they came to several open prairies, in one of

which they saw a herd of antelope, numbering forty to fifty, making a beautiful sight as they took fright and ran away. Young Wells afterward learned that distance lent them charms and was the greatest factor in their beauty. As they rode from one vantage-point to another for the purpose of sight-seeing, the afternoon passed rapidly.

Later, through the interpreter he inquired of Tiburcio if his services could be secured as guide, cook, and companion for the winter, since he had fully made up his mind to occupy the cabin. Tiburcio was overjoyed at the proposition, as it was congenial to his tastes, besides carrying a compensation. Definite arrangements were now made with him, and he was requested to be on hand in the morning. On reaching the ranchito, young Wells's decision was announced to their host of the night previous, much to the latter's satisfaction. During the evening the two Americans planned to return to the village in the morning for the needed supplies. Tiburcio was on hand at the appointed time, and here unconsciously the young man fortified himself in the old hunter's confidence by intrusting him with the custody of his gun, blankets, and several other articles until he should return.

A week later found the young hunter established in the cabin with the interpreter and Tiburcio. A wagon-load of staple supplies was snugly stored away for future use, and they were at peace with the world. By purchase Wells soon had several saddle ponies, and the old hunter adding his pack of javeline dogs, they found themselves well equipped for the winter campaign.

Hunting, in which the young man was an apt scholar, was now the order of the day. Tiburcio was an artist in woodcraft as well as in his knowledge of the habits of animals and birds. On chilly or disagreeable days they would take out the pack of dogs and beat the thickets for the javeline. It was exciting sport to bring to bay a drove of these animals. To shoot from horseback lent a charm, yet made aim uncertain, nor was it advisable to get too close range. Many a young dog made a fatal mistake in getting too near this little animal, and the doctoring of crippled dogs became a daily duty. All surplus game was sent to the ranchito below, where it was always appreciated.

At first the young man wrote regularly long letters home, but as it took Tiburcio a day to go to the post-office, he justified himself in putting writing off, sometimes several weeks, because it ruined a whole day and tired out a horse to mail a letter. Hardships were enjoyed. They thought nothing of spending a whole night going from one turkey roost to another, if half a dozen fine birds were the reward. They would saddle up in the evening and ride ten miles, sleeping out all night by a fire in order to stalk a buck at daybreak, having located his range previously.

Thus the winter passed, and as the limit of the young man's vacation

was near at hand, Wells wrote home pleading for more time, telling his friends how fast he was improving, and estimating that it would take at least six months more to restore him fully to his former health. This request being granted, he contented himself by riding about the country, even visiting cattle ranches south on the Frio River. Now and then he would ride into San Antonio for a day or two, but there was nothing new to be seen there, and his visits were brief. He had acquired a sufficient knowledge of Spanish to get along now without an interpreter.

When the summer was well spent, he began to devise some excuse to give his parents for remaining another winter. Accordingly he wrote his father what splendid opportunities there were to engage in cattle ranching, going into detail very intelligently in regard to the grasses on the tract and the fine opportunity presented for establishing a ranch. The water privileges, the faithfulness of Tiburcio, and other minor matters were fully set forth, and he concluded by advising that they buy or start a brand of cattle on this grant. His father's reply was that he should expect his son to return as soon as the state of his health would permit. He wished to be a dutiful son, yet he wished to hunt just one more winter.

So he felt that he must make another tack to gain his point. Following letters noted no improvement in his health. Now, as the hunting season was near at hand, he found it convenient to bargain with a renegade doctor, who, for the consideration offered, wrote his parents that their son had recently consulted him to see if it would be advisable to return to a rigorous climate in his present condition. Professionally he felt compelled to advise him not to think of leaving Texas for at least another year. To supplement this, the son wrote that he hoped to be able to go home in the early spring. This had the desired effect. Any remorse of conscience he may have felt over the deception resorted to was soon forgotten in following a pack of hounds or stalking deer, for hunting now became the order of the day. The antlered buck was again in his prime. His favorite range was carefully noted. Very few hunts were unrewarded by at least one or more shots at this noble animal. With an occasional visitor, the winter passed as had the previous one. Some congenial spirit would often spend a few days with them, and his departure was always sincerely regretted.

The most peculiar feature of the whole affair was the friendship of the young man for Tiburcio. The latter was the practical hunter, which actual experience only can produce. He could foretell the coming of a norther twenty-four hours in advance. Just which course deer would graze he could predict by the quarter of the wind. In woodcraft he was a trustworthy though unquoted authority. His young patron often showed him his watch and explained how it measured time, but he had no use for it. He could tell nearly enough when it was noon, and if the stars were shining he knew midnight within a few minutes. This he had

learned when a shepherd. He could track a wounded deer for miles, when another could not see a trace of where the animal had passed. He could recognize the footprint of his favorite saddle pony among a thousand others. How he did these things he did not know himself. These companions were graduates of different schools, extremes of different nationalities. Yet Alexander Wells had no desire to elevate the old hunter to his own standard, preferring to sit at his feet.

But finally the appearance of blades of grass and early flowers warned them that winter was gone and that spring was at hand. Their occupation, therefore, was at an end. Now how to satisfy the folks at home and get a further extension of time was the truant's supreme object. While he always professed obedience to parental demands, yet rebellion was brewing, for he did not want to go East--not just yet. Imperative orders to return were artfully parried. Finally remittances were withheld, but he had no use for money. Coercion was bad policy to use in his case. Thus a third and a fourth winter passed, and the young hunter was enjoying life on the Salado, where questions of state and nation did not bother him.

But this existence had an end. One day in the spring a conveyance drove up to the cabin, and an elderly, well-dressed woman alighted. With the assistance of her driver she ran the gauntlet of dogs and reached the cabin door, which was open. There, sitting inside on a dry cow-skin which was spread on the clay floor, was the object of her visit, surrounded by a group of Mexican companions, playing a game called monte. The absorbing interest taken in the cards had prevented the inmates of the jacal from noticing the lady's approach until she stood opposite the door. On the appearance of a woman, the game instantly ceased. Recognition was mutual, but neither mother nor son spoke a word. Her eye took in the surroundings at a glance. Finally she spoke with a half-concealed imperiousness of tone, though her voice was quiet and kindly.

"Alexander, if you wish to see your mother, come to San Antonio, won't you, please?" and turning, she retraced her steps toward the carriage.

Her son arose from his squatting posture, hitching up one side of his trousers, then the other, for he was suspenderless, and following at a distance, scratching his head and hitching his trousers alternately, he at last managed to say, "Ah, well--why--if you can wait a few moments till I change my clothes, I'll--I'll go with you right now."

This being consented to, he returned to the cabin, made the necessary change, and stood before them a picture of health, bewhiskered and bronzed like a pirate. As he was halfway to the vehicle, he turned back, and taking the old black hands of Tiburcio in his own, said in good Spanish, though there was a huskiness in his voice, "That lady is my mother. I may never see you again. I don't think I will. You may

have for your own everything I leave."

There were tears in the old hunter's eyes as he relinquished young Wells's hands and watched him fade from his sight. His mother, unable to live longer without him, had made the trip from New York, and now that she had him in her possession there was no escape. They took the first stage out of the village that night on their return trip for New York State.

But the mother's victory was short-lived and barren. Within three years after the son's return, he failed in two business enterprises in which his father started him. Nothing discouraged, his parents offered him a third opportunity, it containing, however, a marriage condition. But the voice of a siren, singing of flowery prairies and pecan groves on the Salado, in which could be heard the music of hounds and the clattering of horses' hoofs at full speed following, filled every niche and corner of his heart, and he balked at the marriage offer.

When the son had passed his thirtieth year, his parents became resigned and gave their consent to his return to Texas. Long before parental consent was finally obtained, it was evident to his many friends that the West had completely won him; and once the desire of his heart was secured, the languid son beamed with energy in outfitting for his return. He wrung the hands of old friends with a new grip, and with boyish enthusiasm announced his early departure.

On the morning of leaving, quite a crowd of friends and relatives gathered at the depot to see him off. But when a former college chum attempted to remonstrate with him on the social sacrifice which he was making, he turned to the group of friends, and smilingly said, "That's all right. You are honest in thinking that New York is God's country. But out there in Texas also is, for it is just as God made it. Why, I'm going to start a cattle ranch as soon as I get there and go back to nature. Don't pity me. Rather let me pity you, who think, act, and look as if turned out of the same mill. Any social sacrifices which I make in leaving here will be repaid tenfold by the freedom and advantages of the boundless West."

THE FORTIETH FRENCH ASCENT OF MONT BLANC

I arrived at Chamonix on the 18th of August, 1871, fully decided to make the ascent of Mont Blanc, cost what it might. My first attempt in August, 1869, was not successful. Bad weather had prevented me from mounting beyond the Grands-Mulets. This time circumstances seemed scarcely more favourable, for the weather, which had promised to be fine on the morning of the 18th, suddenly changed towards noon. Mont Blanc, as they say in its neighbourhood, "put on its cap and began to smoke its pipe," which, to speak more plainly, means that it is covered with clouds, and that the snow, driven upon it by a south-west wind, formed a long crest on its summit in the direction of the unfathomable precipices of the Brenva glaciers. This crest betrayed to imprudent tourists the route they would have taken, had they had the temerity to venture upon the mountain.

The next night was very inclement. The rain and wind were violent, and the barometer, below the "change," remained stationary.

Towards daybreak, however, several thunder-claps announced a change in the state of the atmosphere. Soon the clouds broke. The chain of the Brevent and the Aiguilles-Rouges betrayed itself. The wind, turning to the north-west, brought into view above the Col de Balme, which shuts in the valley of Chamonix on the north, some light, isolated, fleecy clouds, which I hailed as the heralds of fine weather.

Despite this happy augury and a slight rise in the barometer, M. Balmat, chief guide of Chamonix, declared to me that I must not yet think of attempting the ascent.

"If the barometer continues to rise," he added, "and the weather holds good, I promise you guides for the day after to-morrow--perhaps for to-morrow. Meanwhile, have patience and stretch your legs; I will take you up the Brevent. The clouds are clearing away, and you will be able to exactly distinguish the path you will have to go over to reach the summit of Mont Blanc. If, in spite of this, you are determined to go, you may try it!"

This speech, uttered in a certain tone, was not very reassuring, and gave food for reflection. Still, I accepted his proposition, and he chose as my companion the guide Edward Ravanel, a very sedate and devoted fellow, who perfectly knew his business.

M. Donatien Levesque, an enthusiastic tourist and an intrepid pedestrian, who had made early in the previous year an interesting

and difficult trip in North America, was with me. He had already visited the greater part of America, and was about to descend the Mississippi to New Orleans, when the war cut short his projects and recalled him to France. We had met at Aix-les-Bains, and we had determined to make an excursion together in Savoy and Switzerland.

Donatien Levesque knew my intentions, and, as he thought that his health would not permit him to attempt so long a journey over the glaciers, it had been agreed that he should await my return from Mont Blanc at Chamonix, and should make the traditional visit to the Mer-de-Glace by the Montanvers during my absence.

On learning that I was going to ascend the Brevent, my friend did not hesitate to accompany me thither. The ascent of the Brevent is one of the most interesting trips that can be made from Chamonix. This mountain, about seven thousand six hundred feet high, is only the prolongation of the chain for the Aiguilles-Rouges, which runs from the south-west to the north-east, parallel with that of Mont Blanc, and forms with it the narrow valley of Chamonix. The Brevent, by its central position, exactly opposite the Bossons glacier, enables one to watch the parties which undertake the ascent of the giant of the Alps nearly throughout their journey. It is therefore much frequented.

We started about seven o'clock in the morning. As we went along, I thought of the mysterious words of the master-guide; they annoyed me a little. Addressing Ravanel, I said,--

"Have you made the ascent of Mont Blanc?"

"Yes, monsieur," he replied, "once; and that's enough. I am not anxious to do it again."

"The deuce!" said I. "I am going to try it."

"You are free, monsieur; but I shall not go with you. The mountain is not good this year. Several attempts have already been made; two only have succeeded. As for the second, the party tried the ascent twice. Besides, the accident last year has rather cooled the amateurs."

"An accident! What accident?"

"Did not monsieur hear of it? This is how it happened. A party, consisting of ten guides and porters and two Englishmen, started about the middle of September for Mont Blanc. They were seen to reach the summit; then, some minutes after, they disappeared in a cloud. When the cloud passed over no one was visible. The two travellers, with seven guides and porters, had been blown off by

the wind and precipitated on the Cormayeur side, doubtless into the Brenva glacier. Despite the most vigilant search, their bodies could not be found. The other three were found one hundred and fifty yards below the summit, near the Petits-Mulets. They had become blocks of ice."

"But these travellers must have been imprudent," said I to Ravanel. "What folly it was to start off so late in the year on such an expedition! They should have gone up in August."

I vainly tried to keep up my courage; this lugubrious story would haunt me in spite of myself. Happily the weather soon cleared, and the rays of a bright sun dissipated the clouds which still veiled Mont Blanc, and, at the same time, those which overshadowed my thoughts.

Our ascent was satisfactorily accomplished. On leaving the chalets of Planpraz, situated at a height of two thousand and sixty-two yards, you ascend, on ragged masses of rock and pools of snow, to the foot of a rock called "The Chimney," which is scaled with the feet and hands. Twenty minutes after, you reach the summit of the Brevent, whence the view is very fine. The chain of Mont Blanc appears in all its majesty. The gigantic mountain, firmly established on its powerful strata, seems to defy the tempests which sweep across its icy shield without ever impairing it; whilst the crowd of icy needles, peaks, mountains, which form its cortege and rise everywhere around it, without equalling its noble height, carry the evident traces of a slow wasting away.

From the excellent look-out which we occupied, we could reckon, though still imperfectly, the distance to be gone over in order to attain the summit. This summit, which from Chamonix appears so near the dome of the Goûter, now took its true position. The various plateaus which form so many degrees which must be crossed, and which are not visible from below, appeared from the Brevent, and threw the so-much-desired summit, by the laws of perspective, still farther in the background. The Bossons glacier, in all its splendour, bristled with icy needles and blocks (blocks sometimes ten yards square), which seemed, like the waves of an angry sea, to beat against the sides of the rocks of the Grands-Mulets, the base of which disappeared in their midst.

This marvellous spectacle was not likely to cool my impatience, and I more eagerly than ever promised myself to explore this hitherto unknown world.

My companion was equally inspired by the scene, and from this

moment I began to think that I should not have to ascend Mont Blanc alone.

We descended again to Chamonix; the weather became milder every hour; the barometer continued to ascend; everything seemed to promise well.

The next day at sunrise I hastened to the master-guide. The sky was cloudless; the wind, almost imperceptible, was north-east. The chain of Mont Blanc, the higher summits of which were gilded by the rising sun, seemed to invite the many tourists to ascend it. One could not, in all politeness, refuse so kindly an invitation.

M. Balmat, after consulting his barometer, declared the ascent to be practicable, and promised me the two guides and the porter prescribed in our agreement. I left the selection of these to him. But an unexpected incident disturbed my preparations for departure.

As I came out of M. Balmat's office, I met Ravanel, my guide of the day before.

"Is monsieur going to Mont Blanc?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly," said I. "Is it not a favourable time to go?"

He reflected a few moments, and then said with an embarrassed air,--

"Monsieur, you are my traveller; I accompanied you yesterday to the Brevent, so I cannot leave you now; and, since you are going up, I will go with you, if you will kindly accept my services. It is your right, for on all dangerous journeys the traveller can choose his own guides. Only, if you accept my offer, I ask that you will also take my brother, Ambrose Ravanel, and my cousin, Gaspard Simon. These are young, vigorous fellows; they do not like the ascent of Mont Blanc better than I do; but they will not shirk it, and I answer for them to you as I would for myself."

This young man inspired me with all confidence. I accepted his proposition, and hastened to apprise M. Balmat of the choice I had made. But M. Balmat had meanwhile been selecting guides for me according to their turn on his list. One only had accepted, Edward Simon; the answer of another, Jean Carrier, had not yet been received, though it was scarcely doubtful, as this man had already made the ascent of Mont Blanc twenty-nine times. I thus found myself in an embarrassing position. The guides I had chosen were all from Argenti re, a village six kilometres from Chamonix.

Those of Chamonix accused Ravel of having influenced me in favour of his family, which was contrary to the regulations.

To cut the discussion short, I took Edward Simon, who had already made his preparations as a third guide. He would be useless if I went up alone, but would become indispensable if my friend also ascended.

This settled, I went to tell Donatien Levesque. I found him sleeping the sleep of the just, for he had walked over sixteen kilometres on a mountain the evening before. I had some difficulty in waking him; but on removing first his sheets, then his pillows, and finally his mattress, I obtained some result, and succeeded in making him understand that I was preparing for the hazardous trip.

"Well," said he, yawning, "I will go with you as far as the Grands-Mulets, and await your return there."

"Bravo!" I replied. "I have just one guide too many, and I will attach him to your person."

We bought the various articles indispensable to a journey across the glaciers. Iron-spiked alpenstocks, coarse cloth leggings, green spectacles fitting tightly to the eyes, furred gloves, green veils,--nothing was forgotten. We each had excellent triple-soled shoes, which our guides roughed for the ice. This last is an important detail, for there are moments in such an expedition when the least slip is fatal, not only to yourself, but to the whole party with you.

Our preparations and those of the guides occupied nearly two hours. About eight o'clock our mules were brought; and we set out at last for the chalet of the Pierre-Pointue, situated at a height of six thousand five hundred feet, or three thousand above the valley of Chamonix, not far from eight thousand five hundred feet below the summit of Mont Blanc.

On reaching the Pierre-Pointue, about ten o'clock, we found there a Spanish tourist, M. N----, accompanied by two guides and a porter. His principal guide, Paccard, a relative of the Doctor Paccard who made, with Jacques Balmat, the first ascent of Mont Blanc, had already been to the summit eighteen times. M. N---- was also getting himself ready for the ascent. He had travelled much in America, and had crossed the Cordilleras to Quito, passing through snow at the highest points. He therefore thought that he could, without great difficulty, carry through his new enterprise; but in this he was mistaken. He had reckoned without the steepness of the inclinations which he had to cross, and the

rarefaction of the air. I hasten to add, to his honour, that, since he succeeded in reaching the summit of Mont Blanc, it was due to a rare moral energy, for his physical energies had long before deserted him.

We breakfasted as heartily as possible at the Pierre-Pointue; this being a prudent precaution, as the appetite usually fails higher up among the ice.

M. N---- set out at eleven, with his guides, for the Grands-Mulets. We did not start until noon. The mule-road ceases at the Pierre-Pointue. We had then to go up a very narrow zigzag path, which follows the edge of the Bossons glacier, and along the base of the Aiguille-du-Midi. After an hour of difficult climbing in an intense heat, we reached a point called the Pierre-a-l'Echelle, eight thousand one hundred feet high. The guides and travellers were then bound together by a strong rope, with three or four yards between each. We were about to advance upon the Bossons glacier. This glacier, difficult at first, presents yawning and apparently bottomless crevasses on every hand. The vertical sides of these crevasses are of a glaucous and uncertain colour, but too seducing to the eye; when, approaching closely, you succeed in looking into their mysterious depths, you feel yourself irresistibly drawn towards them, and nothing seems more natural than to go down into them.

You advance slowly, passing round the crevasses, or on the snow bridges of dubious strength. Then the rope plays its part. It is stretched out over these dangerous transits; if the snow bridge yields, the guide or traveller remains hanging over the abyss. He is drawn beyond it, and gets off with a few bruises. Sometimes, if the crevasse is very wide but not deep, he descends to the bottom and goes up on the other side. In this case it is necessary to cut steps in the ice, and the two leading guides, armed with a sort of hatchet, perform this difficult and perilous task. A special circumstance makes the entrance on the Bossons dangerous. You go upon the glacier at the base of the Aiguille-du-Midi, opposite a passage whence stone avalanches often descend. This passage is nearly six hundred feet wide. It must be crossed quickly, and as you pass, a guide stands on guard to avert the danger from you if it presents itself. In 1869 a guide was killed on this spot, and his body, hurled into space by a stone, was dashed to pieces on the rocks nine hundred feet below.

We were warned, and hastened our steps as fast as our inexperience would permit; but on leaving this dangerous zone, another, not less dangerous, awaited us. This was the region of the "seracs,"--immense blocks of ice, the formation of which is not as yet explained.

These are usually situated on the edge of a plateau, and menace the whole valley beneath them. A slight movement of the glacier, or even a light vibration of the temperature, impels their fall, and occasions the most serious accidents.

"Messieurs, keep quiet, and let us pass over quickly." These words, roughly spoken by one of the guides, checked our conversation. We went across rapidly and in silence. We finally reached what is called the "Junction" (which might more properly be called the violent "Separation"), by the Côte Mountain, the Bossons and Tacconay glaciers. At this point the scene assumes an indescribable character; crevasses with changing colours, ice-needles with sharp forms, seracs suspended and pierced with the light, little green lakes compose a chaos which surpasses everything that one can imagine. Added to this, the rush of the torrents at the foot of the glaciers, the sinister and repeated crackings of the blocks which detached themselves and fell in avalanches down the crevasses, the trembling of the ground which opened beneath our feet, gave a singular idea of those desolate places the existence of which only betrays itself by destruction and death.

After passing the "Junction" you follow the Tacconay glacier for awhile, and reach the side which leads to the Grands-Mulets. This part, which is very sloping, is traversed in zigzags. The leading guide takes care to trace them at an angle of thirty degrees, when there is fresh snow, to avoid the avalanches.

After crossing for three hours on the ice and snow, we reach the Grands-Mulets, rocks six hundred feet high, overlooking on one side the Bossons glacier, and on the other the sloping plains which extend to the base of the Goûter dome.

A small hut, constructed by the guides near the summit of the first rock, gives a shelter to travellers, and enables them to await a favourable moment for setting out for the summit of Mont Blanc.

They dine there as well as they can, and sleep too; but the proverb, "He who sleeps dines," does not apply to this elevation, for one cannot seriously do the one or the other.

"Well," said I to Levesque, after a pretence of a meal, "did I exaggerate the splendour of the landscape, and do you regret having come thus far?"

"I regret it so little," he replied, "that I am determined to go on to the summit. You may count on me."

"Very good," said I. "But you know the worst is yet to come."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, "we will go to the end. Meanwhile, let us observe the sunset, which must be magnificent."

The heavens had remained wonderfully clear. The chain of the Brevent and the Aiguilles-Rouges stretched out at our feet. Beyond, the Fiz rocks and the Aiguille-de-Varan rose above the Sallanche Valley, and the whole chains of Mont Fleury and the Reposoir appeared in the background. More to the right we could descry the snowy summit of the Buet, and farther off the Dents-du-Midi, with its five tusks, overhanging the valley of the Rhone. Behind us were the eternal snows of the Goûter, Mont Maudit, and, lastly, Mont Blanc.

Little by little the shadows invaded the valley of Chamonix, and gradually each of the summits which overlook it on the west. The chain of Mont Blanc alone remained luminous, and seemed encircled by a golden halo. Soon the shadows crept up the Goûter and Mont Maudit. They still respected the giant of the Alps. We watched this gradual disappearance of the light with admiration. It lingered awhile on the highest summit, and gave us the foolish hope that it would not depart thence. But in a few moments all was shrouded in gloom, and the livid and ghastly colours of death succeeded the living hues. I do not exaggerate. Those who love mountains will comprehend me.

After witnessing this sublime scene, we had only to await the moment of departure. We were to set out again at two in the morning. Now, therefore, we stretched ourselves upon our mattresses.

It was useless to think of sleeping, much more of talking. We were absorbed by more or less gloomy thoughts. It was the night before the battle, with the difference that nothing forced us to engage in the struggle. Two sorts of ideas struggled in the mind. It was the ebb and flow of the sea, each in its turn. Objections to the venture were not wanting. Why run so much danger? If we succeeded, of what advantage would it be? If an accident happened, how we should regret it! Then the imagination set to work; all the mountain catastrophes rose in the fancy. I dreamed of snow bridges giving way under my feet, of being precipitated in the yawning crevasses, of hearing the terrible noises of the avalanches detaching themselves and burying me, of disappearing, of cold and death seizing upon me, and of struggling with desperate effort, but in vain!

A sharp, horrible noise is heard at this moment

"The avalanche! the avalanche!" I cry.

"What is the matter with you?" asks Levesque, starting up.

Alas! It is a piece of furniture which, in the struggles of my nightmare, I have just broken. This very prosaic avalanche recalls me to the reality. I laugh at my terrors, a contrary current of thought gets the upper hand, and with it ambitious ideas. I need only use a little effort to reach this summit, so seldom attained. It is a victory, as others are. Accidents are rare--very rare! Do they ever take place at all? The spectacle from the summit must be so marvellous! And then what satisfaction there would be in having accomplished what so many others dared not undertake!

My courage was restored by these thoughts, and I calmly awaited the moment of departure.

About one o'clock the steps and voices of the guides, and the noise of opening doors, indicated that that moment was approaching. Soon Ravanel came in and said, "Come, messieurs, get up; the weather is magnificent. By ten o'clock we shall be at the summit."

At these words we leaped from our beds, and hurried to make our toilet. Two of the guides, Ambrose Ravanel and his cousin Simon, went on ahead to explore the road. They were provided with a lantern, which was to show us the way to go, and with hatchets to make the path and cut steps in the very difficult spots. At two o'clock we tied ourselves one to another: the order of march was, Edward Ravanel before me, and at the head; behind me Edward Simon, then Donatien Levesque; after him our two porters (for we took along with us the domestic of the Grands-Mulets hut as a second), and M. N----'s party.

The guides and porters having distributed the provisions between them, the signal for departure was given, and we set off in the midst of profound darkness, directing ourselves according to the lantern held up at some distance ahead.

There was something solemn in this setting out. But few words were spoken; the vagueness of the unknown impressed us, but the new and strange situation excited us, and rendered us insensible to its dangers. The landscape around was fantastic. But few outlines were distinguishable. Great white confused masses, with blackish spots here and there, closed the horizon. The celestial vault shone with remarkable brilliancy. We could perceive, at an uncertain distance, the lantern of the guides who were ahead, and the mournful silence of the night was only disturbed by the dry, distant noise of the hatchet cutting steps in the ice.

We crept slowly and cautiously over the first ascent, going towards the base of the Goûter. After ascending laboriously for two hours, we reached the first plateau, called the "Petit-Plateau," at the foot of the Goûter, at a height of about eleven thousand feet. We rested a few moments and then proceeded, turning now to the left and going towards the edge which conducts to the "Grand-Plateau."

But our party had already lessened in number: M. N---, with his guides, had stopped; his fatigue obliged him to take a longer rest.

About half-past four dawn began to whiten the horizon. At this moment we were ascending the slope which leads to the Grand-Plateau, which we soon safely reached. We were eleven thousand eight hundred feet high. We had well earned our breakfast. Wonderful to relate, Levesque and I had a good appetite. It was a good sign. We therefore installed ourselves on the snow, and made such a repast as we could. Our guides joyfully declared that success was certain. As for me, I thought they resumed work too quickly.

M. N--- rejoined us before long. We urged him to take some nourishment. He peremptorily refused. He felt the contraction of the stomach which is so common in those parts, and was almost broken down.

The Grand-Plateau deserves a special description. On the right rises the dome of the Goûter. Opposite it is Mont Blanc, rearing itself two thousand seven hundred feet above it. On the left are the "Rouges" rocks and Mont Maudit. This immense circle is one mass of glittering whiteness. On every side are vast crevasses. It was in one of these that three of the guides who accompanied Dr. Hamel and Colonel Anderson, in 1820, were swallowed up. In 1864 another guide met his death there.

This plateau must be crossed with great caution, as the crevasses are often hidden by the snow; besides, it is often swept by avalanches. On the 13th of October, 1866, an English traveller and three of his guides were buried under a mass of ice that fell from Mont Blanc. After a perilous search, the bodies of the three guides were found. They were expecting every moment to find that of the Englishman, when a fresh avalanche fell upon the first, and forced the searchers to abandon their task.

Three routes presented themselves to us. The ordinary route, which passes entirely to the left, by the base of Mont Maudit, through a sort of valley called the "Corridor," leads by gentle ascents to the top of the first escarpment of the Rouges rocks.

The second, less frequented, turns to the right by the Goûter, and leads to the summit of Mont Blanc by the ridge which unites these two mountains. You must pursue for three hours a giddy path, and scale a height of moving ice, called the "Camel's Hump."

The third route consists in ascending directly to the summit of the Corridor, crossing an ice-wall seven hundred and fifty feet high, which extends along the first escarpment of the Rouges rocks.

The guides declared the first route impracticable, on account of the recent crevasses which entirely obstructed it; the choice between the two others remained. I thought the second, by the "Camel's Hump," the best; but it was regarded as too dangerous, and it was decided that we should attack the ice-wall conducting to the summit of the Corridor.

When a decision is made, it is best to execute it without delay. We crossed the Grand-Plateau, and reached the foot of this really formidable obstacle.

The nearer we approached the more nearly vertical became its slope. Besides, several crevasses which we had not perceived yawned at its base.

We nevertheless began the difficult ascent. Steps were begun by the foremost guide, and completed by the next. We ascended two steps a minute. The higher we went the more the steepness increased. Our guides themselves discussed what route to follow; they spoke in patois, and did not always agree, which was not a good sign. At last the slope became such that our hats touched the legs of the guide just before us.

A hailstorm of pieces of ice, produced by the cutting of the steps, blinded us, and made our progress still more difficult. Addressing one of the foremost guides, I said,--

"Ah, it's very well going up this way! It is not an open road, I admit: still, it is practicable. Only how are you going to get us down again?"

"O monsieur," replied Ambrose Ravanel, "we will take another route going back."

At last, after violent effort for two hours, and after having cut more than four hundred steps in this terrible mass, we reached the summit of the Corridor completely exhausted.

We then crossed a slightly sloping plateau of snow, and passed along the side of an immense crevasse which obstructed our way. We had scarcely turned it when we uttered a cry of admiration. On the right, Piedmont and the plains of Lombardy were at our feet. On the left, the Pennine Alps and the Oberland, crowned with snow, raised their magnificent crests. Monte Rosa and the Cervin alone still rose above us, but soon we should overlook them in our turn.

This reflection recalled us to the end of our expedition. We turned our gaze towards Mont Blanc, and stood stupefied.

"Heavens! how far off it is still!" cried Levesque.

"And how high!" I added.

It was a discouraging sight. The famous wall of the ridge, so much feared, but which must be crossed, was before us, with its slope of fifty degrees. But after scaling the wall of the Corridor, it did not terrify us. We rested for half an hour and then continued our tramp; but we soon perceived that the atmospheric conditions were no longer the same. The sun shed his warm rays upon us; and their reflection on the snow added to our discomfort. The rarefaction of the air began to be severely felt. We advanced slowly, making frequent halts, and at last reached the plateau which overlooks the second escarpment of the Rouges rocks. We were at the foot of Mont Blanc. It rose, alone and majestic, at a height of six hundred feet above us. Monte Rosa itself had lowered its flag!

Levesque and I were completely exhausted. As for M. N----, who had rejoined us at the summit of the Corridor, it might be said that he was insensible to the rarefaction of the air, for he no longer breathed, so to speak.

We began at last to scale the last stage. We made ten steps and then stopped, finding it absolutely impossible to proceed. A painful contraction of the throat made our breathing exceedingly difficult. Our legs refused to carry us; and I then understood the picturesque expression of Jacques Balmat, when, in narrating his first ascent, he said that "his legs seemed only to be kept up by his trousers!" But our mental was superior to our physical force; and if the body faltered, the heart, responding "Excelsior!" stifled its desperate complaint, and urged forward our poor worn-out mechanism, despite itself. We thus passed the Petits-Mulets, and after two hours of superhuman efforts finally overlooked the entire chain. Mont Blanc was under our feet!

It was fifteen minutes after twelve.

The pride of success soon dissipated our fatigue. We had at last conquered this formidable crest. We overlooked all the others, and the thoughts which Mont Blanc alone can inspire affected us with a deep emotion. It was ambition satisfied; and to me, at least, a dream realized!

Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe. Several mountains in Asia and America are higher; but of what use would it be to attempt them, if, in the absolute impossibility of reaching their summit, you must be content to remain at a lesser height?

Others, such as Mont Cervin, are more difficult of access; but we perceived the summit of Mont Cervin twelve hundred feet below us!

And then, what a view to reward us for our troubles and dangers!

The sky, still pure, had assumed a deep-blue tint. The sun, despoiled of a part of his rays, had lost his brilliancy, as if in a partial eclipse. This effect, due to the rarefaction of the air, was all the more apparent as the surrounding eminences and plains were inundated with light. No detail of the scene, therefore, escaped our notice.

In the south-east, the mountains of Piedmont, and farther off the plains of Lombardy, shut in our horizon. Towards the west, the mountains of Savoy and Dauphiné; beyond, the valley of the Rhone. In the north-west, the Lake of Geneva and the Jura; then, descending towards the south, a chaos of mountains and glaciers, beyond description, overlooked by the masses of Monte Rosa, the Mischabelhoerner, the Cervin, the Weishorn--the most beautiful of crests, as Tyndall calls it--and farther off by the Jungfrau, the Monck, the Eiger, and the Finsteraarhorn.

The extent of our range of vision was not less than sixty leagues. We therefore saw at least one hundred and twenty leagues of country.

A special circumstance happened to enhance the beauty of the scene. Clouds formed on the Italian side and invaded the valleys of the Pennine Alps without veiling their summits. We soon had under our eyes a second sky, a lower sky, a sea of clouds, whence emerged a perfect archipelago of peaks and snow-wrapped mountains. There was something magical in it, which the greatest poets could scarcely describe.

The summit of Mont Blanc forms a ridge from southwest to north-east, two hundred paces long and a yard wide at the culminating point. It seemed like a ship's hull overturned, the keel in the

air.

Strangely enough, the temperature was very high--ten degrees above zero. The air was almost still. Sometimes we felt a light breeze.

The first care of our guides was to place us all in a line on the crest opposite Chamonix, that we might be easily counted from below, and thus make it known that no one of us had been lost. Many of the tourists had ascended the Brevent and the Jardin to watch our ascent. They might now be assured of its success.

But to ascend was not all; we must think also of going down. The most difficult, if not most wearisome, task remained; and then one quits with regret a summit attained at the price of so much toil. The energy which urges you to ascend, the need, so natural and imperious, of overcoming, now fails you. You go forward listlessly, often looking behind you!

It was necessary, however, to decide, and, after a last traditional libation of champagne, we put ourselves in motion. We had remained on the summit an hour. The order of march was now changed. M. N----'s party led off; and, at the suggestion of his guide Paccard, we were all tied together with a rope. M. N----'s fatigue, which his strength, but not his will, betrayed, made us fear falls on his part which would require the help of the whole party to arrest. The event justified our foreboding. On descending the side of the wall, M. N---- made several false steps. His guides, very vigorous and skilful, were happily able to check him; but ours, feeling, with reason, that the whole party might be dragged down, wished to detach us from the rope. Levesque and I opposed this; and, by taking great precautions, we safely reached the base of this giddy ledge. There was no room for illusions. The almost bottomless abyss was before us, and the pieces of detached ice, which bounded by us with the rapidity of an arrow, clearly showed us the route which the party would take if a slip were made.

Once this terrible gap crossed, I began to breathe again. We descended the gradual slopes which led to the summit of the Corridor. The snow, softened by the heat, yielded beneath our feet; we sank in it to the knees, which made our progress very fatiguing. We steadily followed the path by which we ascended in the morning, and I was astonished when Gaspard Simon, turning towards me, said,--

"Monsieur, we cannot take any other road, for the Corridor is impracticable, and we must descend by the wall which we climbed up this morning."

I told Levesque this disagreeable news.

"Only," added Gaspard Simon, "I do not think we can all remain tied together. However, we will see how M. N---- bears it at first."

We advanced towards this terrible wall! M. N----'s party began to descend, and we heard Paccard talking rapidly to him. The inclination became so steep that we perceived neither him nor his guides, though we were bound together by the same rope.

As soon as Gaspard Simon, who went before me, could comprehend what was passing, he stopped, and after exchanging' some words in _patois_ with his comrades, declared that we must detach ourselves from M. N----'s party.

"We are responsible for you," he added, "but we cannot be responsible for others; and if they slip, they will drag us after them."

Saying this, he got loose from the rope. We were very unwilling to take this step; but our guides were inflexible.

We then proposed to send two of them to help M. N----'s guides. They eagerly consented; but having no rope they could not put this plan into execution.

We then began this terrible descent. Only one of us moved at a time, and when each took a step the others buttressed themselves ready to sustain the shock if he slipped. The foremost guide, Edward Ravanel, had the most perilous task; it was for him to make the steps over again, now more or less worn away by the ascending caravan.

We progressed slowly, taking the most careful precautions. Our route led us in a right line to one of the crevasses which opened at the base of the escarpment. When we were going up we could not look at this crevasse, but in descending we were fascinated by its green and yawning sides. All the blocks of ice detached by our passage went the same way, and after two or three bounds, ingulfed themselves in the crevasse, as in the jaws of the minotaur, only the jaws of the minotaur closed after each morsel, while the unsatiated crevasse yawned perpetually, and seemed to await, before closing, a larger mouthful. It was for us to take care that we should not be this mouthful, and all our efforts were made for this end. In order to withdraw ourselves from this fascination, this moral giddiness, if I may so express myself, we tried to joke about the dangerous position in which we found ourselves, and which even a chamois would not have envied us. We

even got so far as to hum one of Offenbach's couplets; but I must confess that our jokes were feeble, and that we did not sing the airs correctly.

I even thought I discovered Levesque obstinately setting the words of "Barbe-Bleue" to one of the airs in "Il Trovatore," which rather indicated some grave preoccupation of the mind. In short, in order to keep up our spirits, we did as do those brave cowards who sing in the dark to forget their fright.

We remained thus, suspended between life and death, for an hour, which seemed an eternity; at last we reached the bottom of this terrible escarpment. We there found M. N---- and his party, safe and sound.

After resting a little while, we continued our journey.

As we were approaching the Petit-Plateau, Edward Ravanel suddenly stopped, and, turning towards us, said,--

"See what an avalanche! It has covered our tracks."

An immense avalanche of ice had indeed fallen from the Goûter, and entirely buried the path we had followed in the morning across the Petit-Plateau.

I estimated that the mass of this avalanche could not comprise less than five hundred cubic yards. If it had fallen while we were passing, one more catastrophe would no doubt have been added to the list, already too long, of the necrology of Mont Blanc.

This fresh obstacle forced us to seek a new road, or to pass around the foot of the avalanche. As we were much fatigued, the latter course was assuredly the simplest; but it involved a serious danger. A wall of ice more than sixty feet high, already partly detached from the Goûter, to which it only clung by one of its angles, overhung the path which we should follow. This great mass seemed to hold itself in equilibrium. What if our passing, by disturbing the air, should hasten its fall? Our guides held a consultation. Each of them examined with a spy-glass the fissure which had been formed between the mountain and this alarming ice-mass. The sharp and clear edges of the cleft betrayed a recent breaking off, evidently caused by the fall of the avalanche.

After a brief discussion, our guides, recognizing the impossibility of finding another road, decided to attempt this dangerous passage.

"We must walk very fast,--even run, if possible," said they, "and

we shall be in safety in five minutes. Come, messieurs, a last effort!"

A run of five minutes is a small matter for people who are only tired; but for us, who were absolutely exhausted, to run even for so short a time on soft snow, in which we sank up to the knees, seemed an impossibility. Nevertheless, we made an urgent appeal to our energies, and after two or three tumbles, drawn forward by one, pushed by another, we finally reached a snow hillock, on which we fell breathless. We were out of danger.

It required some time to recover ourselves. We stretched out on the snow with a feeling of comfort which every one will understand. The greatest difficulties had been surmounted, and though there were still dangers to brave, we could confront them with comparatively little apprehension.

We prolonged our halt in the hope of witnessing the fall of the avalanche, but in vain. As the day was advancing, and it was not prudent to tarry in these icy solitudes, we decided to continue on our way, and about five o'clock we reached the hut of the Grands-Mulets.

After a bad night, attended by fever caused by the sunstrokes encountered in our expedition, we made ready to return to Chamonix; but, before setting out, we inscribed the names of our guides and the principal events of our journey, according to the custom, on the register kept for this purpose at the Grands-Mulets.

About eight o'clock we started for Chamonix. The passage of the Bossons was difficult, but we accomplished it without accident.

Half an hour before reaching Chamonix, we met, at the chalet of the Dard falls, some English tourists, who seemed to be watching our progress. When they perceived us, they hurried up eagerly to congratulate us on our success. One of them presented us to his wife, a charming person, with a well-bred air. After we had given them a sketch of our perilous peregrinations, she said to us, in earnest accents,--

"How much you are envied here by everybody! Let me touch your alpenstocks!"

These words seemed to interpret the general feeling.

The ascent of Mont Blanc is a very painful one. It is asserted that the celebrated naturalist of Geneva, De Saussure, acquired there the seeds of the disease of which he died in a few months after his return from the summit. I cannot better close this

narrative than by quoting the words of M. Markham Sherwell:--

"However it may be," he says, in describing his ascent of Mont Blanc, "I would not advise any one to undertake this ascent, the rewards of which can never have an importance proportionate to the dangers encountered by the tourist, and by those who accompany him."

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Winter Amid the Ice*, by Jules Verne

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JOURNEY WORK

By Dave Dryfoos

_Get mad, old man, but don't give up;
you're not through by a long shot. Somewhere
there's a job for you, a job that youth can't
do ... a dangerous job, but a good one
that'll bring you fame, fortune and peace...._

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Worlds of If Science Fiction, January 1955.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

In a central California tomato field a dusty-faced man opened the autodriver of a nuclear-powered truck and inserted a cannery's address card so the truck would know where to deliver its load.

Six old men--the tomato pickers--waited for their pay in the truck's lengthening shadow. Most of them smoked or dozed, too tired for talk.

Ollie Hollveg, tallest and oldest of the pickers, eyed the heavy-set rancher who sat at the tally table figuring the payroll. For this day's work Ollie expected even less pay than usual; the mumbling, pencil-licking rancher--his name was Rost--seemed to be overacting the role of harried proprietor.

Soon Ollie saw his guess confirmed. A look of frustrated rage spread from face to face as each of the other pickers was in turn called to the table and paid.

All were overage. None dared protest.

At seventy a poor man without relatives willing to care for him was supposed to let himself be permanently retired to a Home for Seniles. If he wasn't senile and didn't want a home with barred windows and a barbed wire fence, he had to lie low and keep his mouth shut.

Anyone could charge an overage person with incompetence. The charge was not a crime and so had no defence.

All of which was old stuff to Ollie Hollveg. He'd been dodging the geriatricians for sixteen years. He considered himself used to the setup.

Yet something about the rancher, Rost--maybe his excessive weight, in contrast with the pickers' under-fed gauntness, or maybe his cardboard cowboy boots and imitation sombrero--made Ollie boil in spite of himself.

He tried not to show his feelings. But when he was called to the tally table the rancher scowled up at him defensively and said, "Don't glare at me, Hollveg! If you moved as fast picking tomatoes as you do collecting your pay, you'd have earned more than this."

He pushed out a little pile of coins that came to four dollars eighty-seven cents.

"Odd pennies?" Ollie's voice broke as he fought to keep it under control. "Odd pennies, when picking's at the rate of two bits a lug? That can't be right. Just because we're old, you're stealing from us!"

Rost's fat face turned livid. "Call me a thief?" he sputtered. "Get off my land!"

Rost jumped clumsily to his feet, upsetting the tally table. Ollie bent to retrieve the coins scattered in the dust.

"Don't try to steal from me!" Rost shouted. He pulled out a small gas gun and discharged it under Ollie's nose. Ollie pitched forward onto his face, twitched, moaned, and lay still.

* * * * *

The deputy sheriff held an ampoule under his nose and brought him to after setting the squad car on the beamway, proceeding under remote control toward the county seat.

The first thing Ollie thought of was his day's pay. He'd never received it. Worse--his bedroll was left behind. And there was no stopping nor turning on the beam way.

He complained bitterly.

"You won't need that stuff," the sharp young deputy said. "Not where you're going."

"I suppose Rost needs it!" Ollie protested.

"He might at that. All he's got is those measly four rented acres of tomatoes. The cannery pays him the same as if he had four hundred acres and could pick by machine.

"About all the profit he can make is what he chisels out of his pickers. You'll be better off in a Home, Pop, than trying to work cheaper than a machine."

"Those Homes are prisons!"

The deputy sighed. "I know how you feel. My old grandfather cried when we put him in. But we couldn't support him and he had no way of making a living.

"The world changes faster than the people in it, Pop. Science all the time lets us live longer, but faster and faster it keeps changing the way we do things. An old guy falls so far behind the times, the only place for him is a Home."

"But if a man wants to stay out," said Ollie, "I don't see why he can't."

"Old guys are dangerous to the rest of us. I saw three people killed, not long ago, trying to dodge an oldtimer who walked too slow to get across a wide street before the lights changed against him."

"They could have slowed the signal," Ollie said. "But no! Always it's the man who has to adapt to the machine, not the machine to the man. The only way to get by in this world is to find some machine you just naturally fit."

"You sound kind of bitter."

"Why not? I used to be a stock control clerk, keeping track of spare parts supply for a nationally distributed line of machine tools. I had twenty girls working for me. Then one day they put in a big computer."

He sighed. "No wonder these suicide salesmen do so well. If I had the money I'd hire somebody to knock me off right now."

"Don't be stupid!" the deputy snarled. "You wouldn't be losing your freedom if you'd had sense enough to stay out of a fight. And when you

talk about suicide salesmen, you sure prove you can't take care of yourself!"

But the deputy was kinder than he sounded. Rather than allege incompetence, he charged Ollie with an assault against Rost. So instead of being remanded to the geriatricians, Ollie was kept overnight in jail and ordered held, next morning, for want of fifty dollars bail.

An hour after bail had been set, a dapper thin faced bailbond broker came to see him.

"Want out?"

"Sure."

"If I put up bail you'll be out."

"No Home?"

"You're classified as a criminal, ineligible for a Home till either you're found not guilty or serve your time."

"Well, but I'm broke. I can't buy a bailbond."

"You can work it off. I'm going to spring you right now. As soon as they let you out, meet me in the southwest corner of the park, just across from the post office."

Ollie did. He thought his bail had been arranged by the deputy.

The broker kept him waiting in the park for half an hour, but was brisk when he appeared.

"My name is Lansing," he said. "Come on. We're taking a little trip."

He steered Ollie to the copter tower at the park's center and with him boarded its endless-belt manlift. They were carried ten stories to the roof, and as they stepped off the manlift an empty copter hovered at hand. It bore on sides and bottom an address, a phone number, and the word Bailbonds, all in big letters.

The copter rose under the tower's control as soon as they'd entered it, and continued to rise till Lansing selected a prepunched destination card and slipped it into the auto-pilot. Then a knowing red light winked on, the copter levelled off and headed southwest, and Lansing took one of a pair of chintz-padded wicker seats, motioning Ollie into the other.

"How do you like the idea of going to a Home?" he asked abruptly.

"I'd rather be dead."

"I know someone who agrees with you. A fellow with bad health who wants to die but doesn't have the guts to do the necessary. Feel like helping him out?"

Ollie sighed, smiled grimly, and shook his head. "No, thanks!"

"You might die yourself, Hollveg." Lansing's voice was heavy with menace.

"I might," Ollie agreed hotly. "I might get murdered. And maybe the same thing will happen to this supposedly sick man you want me to help out. He may not want to die any more than I do. I've heard you suicide salesmen do a lot of murder-for-hire."

"You've heard too much, Hollveg."

Lansing took a plushlined metal case from an inside pocket and removed from it a filled syringe, complete with needle.

"This won't hurt," he said in a sneering imitation of a doctor. "But it'll end your independence like a barbed wire fence."

Ollie began to sweat. "I've heard of those zombie-shots too," he said. He looked wildly around, then controlled himself and gestured almost calmly toward the sky, land, and water visible through the cabin's plastic walls.

"Maybe you can put the needle away for a while," he suggested. "I'm not going to walk out on you right now."

Lansing smiled and complied. "You may keep your health a long time yet," he said urbanely. "If you're sensible, we might even find steady work for you."

Ollie suppressed a shudder.

Lansing tuned in a Western on the physeo. Soon the odor of sage and horse-sweat filled the cabin.

Ollie watched avidly. He hadn't seen enough physeo to be bored with it.

There was a mouth watering camp supper scene, with pleasant odors of broiling beef and burning wood; and a stirring moonlit love scene with a wholesome girl who smelled of soap and starch, and only faintly of cosmetics.

But then came the climactic chase, a combined stampede, stage-coach race, and Indian fight. So much alkali dust poured from the physeo that Ollie got a fit of coughing.

He couldn't stop. After several excruciating minutes he lay down on the floor and gasped to Lansing for a drink of water.

"There isn't any," Lansing told him sharply. "And brother, you'd better get up from there, because you'll have to move fast when we get to Frisco."

Without knowing what would result, Ollie made sure he neither got up nor stopped coughing till they reached San Francisco which was fifteen minutes later.

The pretense involved intense effort for so old a man. His voice went. He was clammy with sweat from head to foot. His face was pale and his hands cold.

By the time the copter reached the roof of San Francisco's Union Square tower, Ollie was actually unable to jump out of the cabin in the thirty seconds allotted by the remote traffic-control system. Lansing tried to carry him out, but the result was merely a delay that damned the stream of traffic.

A winged inspector buzzed them, took remote control of their copter, and led it to the emergency tower at Civic center.

Ollie was taken off on a stretcher. Lansing, his urbanity washed away in a flood of redfaced rage, was still in the copter when it rose. And the hypo was still in his pocket; with Ollie due to get medical attention, he hadn't been able to use it.

Ollie didn't dare stay long in the hospital. As soon as his stretcher was set down on the receiving ward floor, he rolled out of it and with the help of a fat steward struggled to his feet.

"Thanks," he whispered hoarsely. "I have to go now."

"You can't!" said the steward. "You haven't even been examined yet."

"It's against my religion to have to do with medicine," Ollie improvised. "Besides, I'm perfectly well."

"Yeah? What about your voice--or lack of one?"

"A coughing spell. I'm over it now. And my voice is coming back." It was.

The steward unbuttoned his coat and scratched his belly meditatively. "If you don't want treatment you don't have to have it," he said finally. "The joint's overcrowded now."

Ollie didn't congratulate himself when he got out. He was now a fugitive from both the geriatricians and the underworld. Soon the police would want him for bail-jumping, and meanwhile they'd grab him for vagrancy if they caught him off skidrow.

He headed that way at once, walking over to Mission and down it toward Third. A clock on a store-front said five twenty. He felt overdue for supper and bed.

He counted his change--three dollars and forty-two cents. He had no bedroll; no overcoat, either. Even in this nice summer weather it might be a little tough for a fellow to get by on the road with so little plunder. Eighty-six was a trifle old for the rugged life.

What he needed, of course, was a white-collar job. Not only needed, but deserved--he was a good clerk. Therefore he should go to the Hearst Building at Third and Market and scan the want ads posted there. As he'd been doing when in San Francisco for forty years.

He thought of some of the many times he'd stared at that bulletin board. He'd gone there often during the years he'd worked as a construction timekeeper, before that skill became obsolete. Then there'd been an interval when he'd sold rebuilt window washers--for a firm which still owed him money. And he'd haunted the board during the months he'd had that job in the automatic grocery, replenishing the dispensing machines' merchandise.

None of his jobs had come from a want ad. But he had to go look. It was a ritual.

* * * * *

The years had made the ritual a hard one for him. He could read the fine-printed columns only with head cocked an arm's length away from a cheap reading glass held up to them. He took a lot of room; forced a white-capped young mechanic to peer awkwardly around him.

Embarrassed, Ollie moved out of the way. He'd begun to walk off when the young fellow stopped him. "I don't think you saw this one, Dad," he said, pointing.

OLDER MEN (the ad read) without dependents needed for dangerous scientific experiments. If able to pass intensive physical and mental tests report for interview to Civilian Personnel Office, Short Air Force Base, Short, Utah.

"I don't know where the place is at all," Ollie complained wearily.

"Just this side of Salt Lake, on the main line," the young man said. "I served there, so I'm curious. If you're not--well--" He shrugged and edged away.

"Thanks, son," Ollie called after him. "I'm going to follow that up."

The young man walked on without looking back.

Ollie felt committed, not only by his offhand declaration, but by his ritual. He'd come to look for a job; he'd found one for which he was eligible; he must go after it.

He headed down Third Street toward the freight yards but stopped at a skidrow restaurant for a bowl of stew and a cup of coffee. Passing an old-fashioned catchpenny grocery he went in and bought a half-dozen rolls to take with him. The proprietor, squat, unshaven, and swarthy, picked out a large red apple and slipped it in with the rolls.

"Good for you," he said, smiling.

Ollie shook his head.

The grocer frowned, then replaced the apple with an orange. "Easier on teeth," he said.

"Thank you," said Ollie, smiling. "You make me feel lucky. I'm answering a want ad--maybe I'll get the job."

The grocer smiled vaguely. "I hope." Then his face livened. "What job? In paper?"

"Yes." There could be no other, for a man his age.

"It says 'dangerous,'" said the grocer. "I think maybe they cut you up, find out how you live so long. Or make you sick to try new cure.

"You find better job--or Home. That one bad." There was a slight pause.

"Look. I close soon. You sweep store, I give you dollar."

"You're a good guy," said Ollie. "But I've got three dollars now." He showed them proudly. "You save yours for somebody who doesn't have a job to try for."

He tucked the rolls and orange inside his shirt, marched valiantly out of the dark little store, and continued on to the yards.

The heavy traffic there confused him briefly. Transcontinental freight was carried in long trains of rubber-tired cars towed on elevated beamways by remotely-controlled, nuclear-fueled steam tractors. Here at the San Francisco yards the trains were broken up and the individual cars hauled by turbo-tractor on city streets and suburban roads for delivery at the addressees' doors.

The cars were huge, the noise and bustle awe-inspiring. Ollie stood outside the main exit watching the little tractors and big cars emerge, till a beamway bull came over, flashed a badge, and told him to move on.

He did. He was a fugitive from so many things; he couldn't afford resentments.

He went on around the yards. They were vast. He felt sure that somewhere there must be an unguarded entry, and set out to find it, moving cautiously from shadow to shadow along the high plasti-board fence.

Twice he blundered into watchmen. Once he nearly got himself run over. But after a couple of hours he saw a bindlestiff slip through an unguarded gate, and in half a minute he was right behind the man.

Ollie moved away from him. There was safety in solitude. Besides, he had to find a Salt Lake train.

The sealed cars were addressed like so many packages. But he had to have light to read by, and he risked discovery every time he moved into the light and took his stance behind the reading glass.

There were other hazards; television beams for the yard clerks to read numbers by, invisible beams for the bulls to catch him with, headlights that suddenly flashed on blindingly, humped cars rolling unattended on silent, murderous tires.

Ollie felt like an ant on a busy sidewalk, liable to be crushed under foot at any moment.

But an added hazard helped him find his train. The bulls had read that want ad too. They were out in force around a string of cars. He slipped between two sleepy-looking men, checked an address, and then slipped out again, certain every car would be inspected before departure.

A good way down the yard he hid at the base of the fence, dozing and shivering for several hours as he lay stretched out on the dew-chilled concrete. He checked each outbound train as it went by, and again knew his by the bulls on it.

They were on the cowcatcher and in the cab, on the car roofs, and in the caboose with the train-crew of three trouble-shooting mechanics. Highlights gleamed on their weapons. Their job was to keep or get all transients off that train--and they would if they could.

Ollie let most of the train go past. The caboose came by at about fifteen miles an hour with a sharp-eyed guard head-and-shoulders out of the cupola. Ollie let him get past, too--and hoped he went on looking toward the front.

He began to hobble parallel to the train, dismayed at the stiffness that had set in while he lay out on the damp concrete.

As the rear of the caboose drew even with him he emerged from the shadows and dived for the coupling at the car's rear. He caught it clumsily, tore the nail off his left ring finger, but hung on.

He tried to trot but the train dragged him. He gave a leapfrog player's jump and landed on top of his own hands, his thighs around the coupling, his nose against the rear platform-wall of the caboose.

The engine jerked slack out of the long train and nearly dislodged him. One at a time he moved his hands from the coupling to the base of the wall. He edged in a little closer. The train gathered speed.

He wasn't really on but he couldn't safely get off. He'd intended climbing under the caboose to its rear truck, but the bulls and his own lack of agility made this impossible so now he must ride where he was, exposed to battering wind and searching cold as the train crossed the High Sierras, and also exposed to the whims of the trainmen if any should come out on the platform and look down.

He'd seen men shot off trains. But he didn't worry about it. Instead, like the old hand he was, he tried to sleep while clinging there.

* * * * *

At Sparks the train stopped for a maintenance check. The guards formed a perimeter but Ollie was inside it. Too stiff to move far, he stayed in a shadow while the mechanics inspected, then he climbed under the caboose and stretched out on a girder separating two tires of the rearmost, six-tired truck.

The tremendous tires fanned up hot winds when rolling, and these had warmed the steel he lay on. Before the train started he ate a roll, sucked the orange, and stretched out face down for the speed run across the central Nevada flatlands.

The guards stayed behind. After the train had started, one of them

shined a light directly in Ollie's eyes.

The train kept on. And he was too close to the tires to be shot at; rubber-coated death whirled within three inches at either side of him.

As the train picked up speed he was careful to lie still, but beyond making sure he didn't touch the tires Ollie tried to put all thought of risk from his mind.

He saw a sudden vivid picture of his dead wife and son as they'd looked before the undertaker fixed them. They'd been killed while travelling. In times when to succeed was to get somewhere, they'd been killed en route. He couldn't remember where to.

They'd died in a head-on crash caused by a stranger's error in judgment. A thing that didn't happen any more, now that highway vehicles were controlled by beamed energy instead of individual drivers.

The highway was one place where the human had been tested against the machine and found inferior. The office was another. If Minna and Charlie hadn't died so long ago, they might have lived to see him now--a bindlestiff so low he even lacked a bindle.

Still, it was lonely with no one in the whole wide world to care whether he lived or died.

He sighed, shifted his position, and was nearly jerked under the wheels by sudden contact with the tire on his right.

It was over in an instant. The tire simply ripped the coat from his back.

He still wore the sleeves. The rest was gone. Weathered thread had saved him.

* * * * *

He had ample time to think about the irony of that before rosy dawnlight was reflected into his face from a glittering salt-pan. He knew then he was still west of Salt Lake City, and that Short Air Force Base was close.

Also close, now that night had withdrawn its concealment, was discovery. He was sure to be found when next the train stopped.

Therefore he eased himself out of his coatsleeves. He moved gingerly, but still chanced death to improve his appearance.

The train slowed, stopped.

Someone called, "Here he is," and a redhaired Air Policeman leaned under the caboose, looked him over, and said, "Come on out, Pop."

Ollie's legs were stiff. The airman had to help.

"You're in kind of rough shape," he said. "Where did you think you were going?"

"Why--uh--east." Ollie cast down his eyes, ashamed even to admit he'd once entertained the notion he might get a job.

The airman wasn't fooled. "You slipped through the train guards after the job we've got here. Didn't you, Pop?"

"All I want is out," said Ollie stubbornly.

"Well," said the airman, "you can't get off the Base without a pass. You'll have to go up to Civilian Personnel and get one."

"Can't I wash first?"

He could. He could also get a jeep ride to the terra-cotta headquarters building, with a stop along the way for a canteen-cup of coffee and a slice of bread.

When they got to headquarters the airman asked, "Tell the truth, now; didn't you really come after this job?"

Ollie wouldn't admit he'd lied about it, so he lied again.

"I've seen some of the other guys come in after it," the airman insisted, "and you look as good as any of them. Why not try for it, now you're here?"

He gave Ollie a long application to fill out and left him at a desk just outside the personnel office.

From somewhere came the clatter of a facsimile-printer, carrying the day's message from GHQ. A boy whistled above the squawk of a superwave radio. But otherwise the place seemed deserted at that early-morning hour.

For lack of anything better to do, Ollie filled out the application, leaving the job title blank. The only thing that gave him pause, aside from the difficulty of seeing, was his arrest record, and in time he decided to put it down just as it was, including the pending assault charge with its implication of jumped bail.

After an hour a young captain entered the building and went to the office marked Adjutant. A fat major gave Ollie a piercing glance and then entered the Civilian Personnel office. At about five minutes of eight the place suddenly boiled with military and civilian people of all ages and both sexes.

Things quieted promptly at eight. A blond youth came out of the office, glanced at Ollie's application form, kept it, and invited him inside.

"First thing for you," he said, "will be a physical exam."

He took Ollie to another room and turned him over to a young medic who put him in a box like a steam cabinet, attached electrodes to his temples, wrists, ankles, and chest, and put a helmet on his head.

For five minutes Ollie stood encased, his stomach fluttering as he recalled the grocer's warning. He waited for the vivisection to begin.

It didn't. He was removed from his shell and handed an inked graph.

"Here's your profile," the medic said. "It's good, considering. Take it back to the fellow who brought you here."

He did and was ushered into a glassed-in office containing two desks, each labelled Civilian Personnel Officer. At one sat the fat major. At the other, a tallish young civilian held Ollie's application.

"My name is Katt," the civilian said, getting up to shake hands. "This is Major Brownwight."

The major also shook his hand. Katt placed a straightbacked chair between the two desks, and invited Ollie to sit in it. Ollie did, gazing uncertainly from one man to the other.

"We heard you arrived by train early this morning," Katt said.

"Yes, sir."

"You were first reported in Sparks, but I'll bet you boarded that train in San Francisco."

"Yes, sir. What's the penalty?"

"None. I like it. It's enterprising, athletic, and even brave for a man of your years to do that for a job. Shows resourcefulness. Also skill, because men are trying to nip rides here from all over the United States, but very few arrive."

"They're too old," said Major Brownwight. He turned to Katt and added,

"I still don't think it's an old man's job!"

"Well sir," said Katt, stifling a sigh, "your predecessor understood and approved of it. These old-timers have a lower metabolic rate than younger people, with all that that implies. They don't mind the enforced inactivity, they won't use up so much oxygen nor need so much food, they won't spend so many hours in sleep. All qualities we need."

"Maybe so." The major turned to Ollie and said, "I just transferred in here. You know more about this than I do."

"I don't even know what you're talking about," Ollie told him.

"Without divulging classified information," said Katt, "for which you are not yet cleared, I can tell you these are little one-man jobs. Small stuff--for pioneering. That's why we want you men with lots of patience, who're used to being alone. People without a fixed place in society, and not too much to leave behind. A husky old itinerant like you is just what we want."

"For what?" Ollie insisted.

"To travel--as a sort of working passenger, since piloting will of course be mechanical--in the first manned spaceships to leave Earth for the stars."

"Spaceships?"

"Sure. Solo spaceships. Super-fast, which means the trip will seem relatively short while you're on it, and will give you extra earth-years of life in the end.

"The job is much easier and less hazardous than the train ride that brought you here. You're a natural for it. You really fit it."

"Do I, now?" A quick glow of inner warmth melted many bad years away. Ollie grinned.

"You know," he said, "in a way that's a disappointment."

"How so?" asked the major aggressively. "Don't you want the job?"

"Yes, sir. I want it. But all these years I've been telling myself that somewhere on this earth was a place I'd fit into, if only I could find it. Now you tell me I fit in, but the place isn't here on Earth after all!"

"Not right now, no," said Katt. "But you'll be back. Rich and famous, too. No Home for you, Mr. Hollveg--you'll have a nice place of your

own."

And he did--after photographing the planets of Arcturus.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

Mr. Gribble sat in his small front parlour in a state of angry amazement. It was half-past six and there was no Mrs. Gribble; worse still, there was no tea. It was a state of things that had only happened once before. That was three weeks after marriage, and on that occasion Mr. Gribble had put his foot down with a bang that had echoed down the corridors of thirty years.

The fire in the little kitchen was out, and the untidy remains of Mrs. Gribble's midday meal still disgraced the table. More and more dazed, the indignant husband could only come to the conclusion that she had gone out and been run over. Other things might possibly account for her behaviour; that was the only one that would excuse it.

His meditations were interrupted by the sound of a key in the front door, and a second later a small, anxious figure entered the room and, leaning against the table, strove to get its breath. The process was not helped by the alarming distension of Mr. Gribble's figure.

"I—I got home—quick as I could—Henry," said Mrs. Gribble, panting.

"Where is my tea?" demanded her husband. "What do you mean by it? The fire's out and the kitchen is just as you left it."

"I—I've been to a lawyer's, Henry," said Mrs. Gribble, "and I had to wait."

"Lawyer's?" repeated her husband.

"I got a letter this afternoon telling me to call. Poor Uncle George, that went to America, is gone."

"That is no excuse for neglecting me," said Mr. Gribble. "Of course people die when they are old. Is that the one that got on and made money?"

His wife, apparently struggling to repress a little excitement, nodded. "He—he's left me two hundred pounds a year for life, Henry," she said, dabbing at her pale blue eyes with a handkerchief. "They're going to pay

it monthly; sixteen pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence a month. That's how he left it."

"Two hund—" began Mr. Gribble, forgetting himself. "Two hun——Go and get my tea! If you think you're going to give yourself airs because your uncle's left you money, you won't do it in my house."

He took a chair by the window, and, while his wife busied herself in the kitchen, sat gazing in blank delight at the little street. Two hundred a year! It was all he could do to resume his wonted expression as his wife re-entered the room and began to lay the table. His manner, however, when she let a cup and saucer slip from her trembling fingers to smash on the floor left nothing to be desired.

"It's nice to have money come to us in our old age," said Mrs. Gribble, timidly, as they sat at tea. "It takes a load off my mind."

"Old age!" said her husband, disagreeably. "What d'ye mean by old age? I'm fifty-two, and feel as young as ever I did."

"You look as young as ever you did," said the docile Mrs. Gribble. "I can't see no change in you. At least, not to speak of."

"Not so much talk," said her husband. "When I want your opinion of my looks I'll ask you for it. When do you start getting this money?"

"Tuesday week; first of May," replied his wife. "The lawyers are going to send it by registered letter."

Mr. Gribble grunted.

"I shall be sorry to leave the house for some things," said his wife, looking round. "We've been here a good many years now, Henry."

"Leave the house!" repeated Mr. Gribble, putting down his tea-cup and staring at her.

"Leave the house! What are you talking about?"

"But we can't stay here, Henry," faltered Mrs. Gribble. "Not with all that money. They are building some beautiful houses in Charlton Grove now—bathroom, tiled hearths, and beautiful stained glass in the front door; and all for twenty-eight pounds a year."

"Wonderful!" said the other, with a mocking glint in his eye.

"And iron palings to the front garden, painted chocolate-colour picked out with blue," continued his wife, eyeing him wistfully.

Mr. Gribble struck the table a blow with his fist. "This house is good enough for me," he roared; "and what's good enough for me is good enough for you. You want to waste money on show; that's what you want. Stained glass and bow-windows! You want a bow-window to loll about in, do you? Shouldn't wonder if you don't want a servant-gal to do the work."

Mrs. Gribble flushed guiltily, and caught her breath.

"We're going to live as we've always lived," pursued Mr. Gribble. "Money ain't going to spoil me. I ain't going to put on no side just because I've come in for a little bit. If you had your way we should end up in the workhouse."

He filled his pipe and smoked thoughtfully, while Mrs. Gribble cleared away the tea-things and washed up. Pictures, good to look upon, formed in the smoke-pictures of a hale, hearty man walking along the primrose path arm-in-arm with two hundred a year; of the mahogany and plush of the saloon bar at the Grafton Arms; of Sunday jaunts, and the Oval on summer afternoons.

He ate his breakfast slowly on the first of the month, and, the meal finished, took a seat in the window with his pipe and waited for the postman. Mrs. Gribble's timid reminders concerning the flight of time and consequent fines for lateness at work fell on deaf ears. He jumped up suddenly and met the postman at the door.

"Has it come?" inquired Mrs. Gribble, extending her hand.

By way of reply her husband tore open the envelope and, handing her the covering letter, counted the notes and coin and placed them slowly in his pockets. Then, as Mrs. Gribble looked at him, he looked at the clock, and, snatching up his hat, set off down the road.

He was late home that evening, and his manner forbade conversation. Mrs. Gribble, with the bereaved air of one who has sustained an irremediable loss, sighed fitfully, and once applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

"That's no good," said her husband at last; "that won't bring him back."

"Bring who back?" inquired Mrs. Gribble, in genuine surprise.

"Why, your Uncle George," said Mr. Gribble. "That's what you're turning on the water-cart for, ain't it?"

"I wasn't thinking of him," said Mrs. Gribble, trying to speak bravely. "I was thinking of——"

"Well, you ought to be," interrupted her husband. "He wasn't my uncle, poor chap, but I've been thinking of him, off and on, all day. That

bloater-paste you are eating now came from his kindness. I brought it home as a treat.”

“I was thinking of my clothes,” said Mrs. Gribble, clenching her hands together under the table. “When I found I had come in for that money, the first thing I thought was that I should be able to have a decent dress. My old ones are quite worn out, and as for my hat and jacket—”

“Go on,” said her husband, fiercely. “Go on. That's just what I said: trust you with money, and we should be poorer than ever.”

“I'm ashamed to be seen out,” said Mrs. Gribble.

“A woman's place is the home,” said Mr. Gribble; “and so long as I'm satisfied with your appearance nobody else matters. So long as I am pleased, that's everything. What do you want to go dressing yourself up for? Nothing looks worse than an over-dressed woman.”

“What are we going to do with all that money, then?” inquired Mrs. Gribble, in trembling tones.

“That'll do,” said Mr. Gribble, decidedly. “That'll do. One o' these days you'll go too far. You start throwing that money in my teeth and see what happens. I've done my best for you all these years, and there's no reason to suppose I sha'n't go on doing so. What did you say? What!”

Mrs. Gribble turned to him a face rendered ghastly by terror. “I—I said—it was my money,” she stammered.

Mr. Gribble rose, and stood for a full minute regarding her. Then, kicking a chair out of his way, he took his hat from its peg in the passage and, with a bang of the street-door that sent a current of fresh, sweet air circulating through the house, strode off to the Grafton Arms.

It was past eleven when he returned, but even the spectacle of his wife laboriously darning her old dress failed to reduce his good-humour in the slightest degree. In a frivolous mood he even took a feather from the dismembered hat on the table and stuck it in his hair. He took the stump of a strong cigar from his lips and, exhaling a final cloud of smoke, tossed it into the fireplace.

“Uncle George dead,” he said, at last, shaking his head. “Hadn't pleasure acquaintance, but good man. Good man.”

He shook his head again and gazed mistily at his wife.

“He was a teetotaller,” she remarked, casually.

“He was tee-toiler,” repeated Mr. Gribble, regarding her equably. “Good man. Uncle George dead-tee-toller.”

Mrs. Gribble gathered up her work and began to put it away.

“Bed-time,” said Mr. Gribble, and led the way upstairs, singing.

His good-humour had evaporated by the morning, and, having made a light breakfast of five cups of tea, he went off, with lagging steps, to work. It was a beautiful spring morning, and the idea of a man with two hundred a year and a headache going off to a warehouse instead of a day's outing seemed to border upon the absurd. What use was money without freedom? His toil was sweetened that day by the knowledge that he could drop it any time he liked and walk out, a free man, into the sunlight.

By the end of a week his mind was made up. Each day that passed made his hurried uprising and scrambled breakfast more and more irksome; and on Monday morning, with hands in trouser-pockets and legs stretched out, he leaned back in his chair and received his wife's alarming intimations as to the flight of time with a superior and sphinx-like smile.

“It's too fine to go to work to-day,” he said, lazily. “Come to that, any day is too fine to waste at work.”

Mrs. Gribble sat gasping at him.

“So on Saturday I gave 'em a week's notice,” continued her husband, “and after Potts and Co. had listened while I told 'em what I thought of 'em, they said they'd do without the week's notice.”

“You've never given up your job?” said Mrs. Gribble.

“I spoke to old Potts as one gentleman of independent means to another,” said Mr. Gribble, smiling. “Thirty-five bob a week after twenty years' service! And he had the cheek to tell me I wasn't worth that. When I told him what he was worth he talked about sending for the police. What are you looking like that for? I've worked hard for you for thirty years, and I've had enough of it. Now it's your turn.”

“You'd find it hard to get another place at your age,” said his wife; “especially if they wouldn't give you a good character.”

“Place!” said the other, staring. “Place! I tell you I've done with work. For a man o' my means to go on working for thirty-five bob a week is ridiculous.”

“But suppose anything happened to me,” said his wife, in a troubled voice.

“That's not very likely,” said Mr. Gribble.

“You're tough enough. And if it did your money would come to me.”

Mrs. Gribble shook her head.

“WHAT?” roared her husband, jumping up.

“I've only got it for life, Henry, as I told you,” said Mrs. Gribble, in alarm. “I thought you knew it would stop when I died.”

“And what's to become of me if anything happens to you, then?” demanded the dismayed Mr. Gribble. “What am I to do?”

Mrs. Gribble put her handkerchief to her eyes.

“And don't start weakening your constitution by crying,” shouted the incensed husband.

“What are you mumbling?”

“I sa—sa—said, let's hope—you'll go first,” sobbed his wife. “Then it will be all right.”

Mr. Gribble opened his mouth, and then, realizing the inadequacy of the English language for moments of stress, closed it again. He broke his silence at last in favour of Uncle George.

“Mind you,” he said, concluding a peroration which his wife listened to with her fingers in her ears—“mind you, I reckon I've been absolutely done by you and your precious Uncle George. I've given up a good situation, and now, any time you fancy to go off the hooks, I'm to be turned into the street.”

“I'll try and live, for your sake, Henry,” said his wife.

“Think of my worry every time you are ill,” pursued the indignant Mr. Gribble.

Mrs. Gribble sighed, and her husband, after a few further remarks concerning Uncle George, his past and his future, announced his intention of going to the lawyers and seeing whether anything could be done. He came back in a state of voiceless gloom, and spent the rest of a beautiful day indoors, smoking a pipe which had lost much of its flavour, and regarding with a critical and anxious eye the small, weedy figure of his wife as she went about her work.

The second month's payment went into his pocket as a matter of course,

but on this occasion Mrs. Gribble made no requests for new clothes or change of residence. A little nervous cough was her sole comment.

“Got a cold?” inquired her husband, starting.

“I don't think so,” replied his wife, and, surprised and touched at this unusual display of interest, coughed again.

“Is it your throat or your chest?” he inquired, gruffly.

Mrs. Gribble coughed again to see. After five coughs she said she thought it was her chest.

“You'd better not go out o' doors to-day, then,” said Mr. Gribble.
“Don't stand about in draughts; and I'll fetch you in a bottle of cough mixture when I go out. What about a lay-down on the sofa?”

His wife thanked him, and, reaching the sofa, watched with half-closed eyes as he cleared the breakfast-table. It was the first time he had done such a thing in his life, and a little honest pride in the possession of such a cough would not be denied. Dim possibilities of its vast usefulness suddenly occurred to her.

She took the cough mixture for a week, by which time other symptoms, extremely disquieting to an ease-loving man, had manifested themselves. Going upstairs deprived her of breath; carrying a loaded tea-tray produced a long and alarming stitch in the side. The last time she ever filled the coal-scuttle she was discovered sitting beside it on the floor in a state of collapse.

“You'd better go and see the doctor,” said Mr. Gribble.

Mrs. Gribble went. Years before the doctor had told her that she ought to take life easier, and she was now able to tell him she was prepared to take his advice.

“And, you see, I must take care of myself now for the sake of my husband,” she said, after she had explained matters.

“I understand,” said the doctor.

“If anything happened to me—” began the patient.

“Nothing shall happen,” said the other. “Stay in bed to-morrow morning, and I'll come round and overhaul you.”

Mrs. Gribble hesitated. “You might examine me and think I was all right,” she objected; “and at the same time you wouldn't know how I feel.”

"I know just how you feel," was the reply. "Good-bye."

He came round the following morning and, following the dejected Mr. Gribble upstairs, made a long and thorough investigation of his patient.

"Say 'ninety-nine,'" he said, adjusting his stethoscope.

Mrs. Gribble ticked off "ninety-nines" until her husband's ears ached with them. The doctor finished at last, and, fastening his bag, stood with his beard in his hand, pondering. He looked from the little, whitefaced woman on the bed to the bulky figure of Mr. Gribble.

"You had better lie up for a week," he said, decidedly. "The rest will do you good."

"Nothing serious, I s'pose?" said Mr. Gribble, as he led the way downstairs to the small parlour.

"She ought to be all right with care," was the reply.

"Care?" repeated the other, distastefully. "What's the matter with her?"

"She's not very strong," said the doctor; "and hearts don't improve with age, you know. Under favourable conditions she's good for some years yet. The great thing is never to thwart her. Let her have her own way in everything."

"Own way in everything?" repeated the dumbfounded Mr. Gribble.

The doctor nodded. "Never let her worry about anything," he continued; "and, above all, never find fault with her."

"Not," said Mr. Gribble, thickly—"not even for her own good?"

"Unless you want to run the risk of losing her."

Mr. Gribble shivered.

"Let her have an easy time," said the doctor, taking up his hat. "Pamper her a bit if you like; it won't hurt her. Above all, don't let that heart of hers get excited."

He shook hands with the petrified Mr. Gribble and went off, grinning wickedly. He had few favourites, and Mr. Gribble was not one of them.

For two days the devoted husband did the housework and waited on the invalid. Then he wearied, and, at his wife's suggestion, a small girl was engaged as servant. She did most of the nursing as well, and, having

a great love for the sensational, took a grave view of her mistress's condition.

It was a relief to Mr. Gribble when his wife came downstairs again, and he was cheered to see that she looked much better. His satisfaction was so marked that it brought on her cough again.

"It's this house, I think," she said, with a resigned smile. "It never did agree with me.

"Well, you've lived in it a good many years," said her husband, controlling himself with difficulty.

"It's rather dark and small," said Mrs. Gribble. "Not but what it is good enough for me. And I dare say it will last my time."

"Nonsense!" said her husband, gruffly. "You want to get out a bit more. You've got nothing to do now we are wasting all this money on a servant. Why don't you go out for little walks?"

Mrs. Gribble went, after several promptings, and the fruit of one of them was handed by the postman to Mr. Gribble a few days afterwards. Half-choking with wrath and astonishment, he stood over his trembling wife with the first draper's bill he had ever received.

"One pound two shillings and threepence three-farthings!" he recited. "It must be a mistake. It must be for somebody else."

Mrs. Gribble, with her hand to her heart, tottered to the sofa and lay there with her eyes closed.

"I had to get some dress material," she said, in a quavering voice. "You want me to go out, and I'm so shabby I'm ashamed to be seen."

Mr. Gribble made muffled noises in his throat; then, afraid to trust himself, he went into the back-yard and, taking a seat on an upturned bucket, sat with his head in his hands peering into the future.

The dressmaker's bill and a bill for a new hat came after the next monthly payment; and a bill for shoes came a week later. Hoping much from the well-known curative effects of fine feathers, he managed to treat the affair with dignified silence. The only time he allowed full play to his feelings Mrs. Gribble took to her bed for two days, and the doctor had a heart-to-heart talk with him on the doorstep.

It was a matter of great annoyance to him that his wife still continued to attribute her ill-health to the smallness and darkness of the house; and the fact that there were only two of the houses in Charlton Grove left caused a marked depression of spirits. It was clear that she was

fretting. The small servant went further, and said that she was fading away.

They moved at the September quarter, and a slight, but temporary, improvement in Mrs. Gribble's health took place. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled over new curtains and new linoleum. The tiled hearths, and stained glass in the front door filled her with a deep and solemn thankfulness. The only thing that disturbed her was the fact that Mr. Gribble, to avoid wasting money over necessities, contrived to spend an unduly large portion on personal luxuries.

"We ought to have some new things for the kitchen," she said one day.

"No money," said Mr. Gribble, laconically.

"And a mat for the bathroom."

Mr. Gribble got up and went out.

She had to go to him for everything. Two hundred a year and not a penny she could call her own! She consulted her heart, and that faithful organ responded with a bound that set her nerves quivering. If she could only screw her courage to the sticking-point the question would be settled for once and all.

White and trembling she sat at breakfast on the first of November, waiting for the postman, while the unconscious Mr. Gribble went on with his meal. The double-knocks down the road came nearer and nearer, and Mr. Gribble, wiping his mouth, sat upright with an air of alert and pleased interest. Rapid steps came to the front door, and a double bang followed.

"Always punctual," said Mr. Gribble, good-humouredly.

His wife made no reply, but, taking a blue-crossed envelope from the maid in her shaking fingers, looked round for a knife. Her gaze encountered Mr. Gribble's outstretched hand.

"After you," he said sharply.

Mrs. Gribble found the knife, and, hacking tremulously at the envelope, peeped inside it and, with her gaze fastened on the window, fumbled for her pocket. She was so pale and shook so much that the words died away on her husband's lips.

"It is—all right," gasped his wife.

She put her hand to her throat and, hardly able to believe in her victory, sat struggling for breath. Before her, grim and upright, her

husband sat, a figure of helpless smouldering wrath.

“You might lose it,” he said, at last. “I sha'n't lose it,” said his wife.

To avoid further argument, she arose and went slowly upstairs. Through the doorway Mr. Gribble saw her helping herself up by the banisters, her left hand still at her throat. Then he heard her moving slowly about in the bedroom overhead.

He took out his pipe and filled it mechanically, and was just holding a match to the tobacco when he paused and gazed with a puzzled air at the ceiling. “Blamed if it don't sound like somebody dancing!” he growled.

Project Gutenberg, *Night Watches*, by W.W. Jacobs

THE FIRST-FOOT.

I.

THE husband, with an eye of warm alacrity and a welcome manner that should have made his fortune in some livelier hostel than the dreary inn of Flanders Moss, regarded the stranger with compassion. The wife, an acrid peevish body, ill-content to be roused from bed at such an hour, plucked at the strings of her night-cap, loosened and fastened them half a dozen times as if they bridled a wroth that choked her, and looked with candid disapproval on the customer standing in the kitchen with the rain running from his wrap-rascal coat on the fresh-caumed flagstones of her floor.

“H’m!” she coughed; “it’s no’ a time o’ the year when we’re lookin’ for many visitors to the Flanders Moss.”

“But still-and-on ye’re welcome,” said the husband hastily, tender of the stranger’s feelings. “I think there’s an egg or twa, Jennet, isna there? And—and the hen; or—or yon ham?”

But Jennet tied her cap more tightly down upon her ears.

“I was making for the port o’ Menteith,” explained the stranger in a breath, compassing the chamber and the characters before him at a gled’s glance, feeling himself master of them both, flinging off the wrap-rascal and throwing his bonnet on the hearth to dry. It struck the stone with a sodden slap that would have made plain the kind of night from which he

had escaped, even if the ear had not more eloquently indicated that the house was in the very throat of tempest.

“Ye’ll no hae pack nor powney?” said the dame sourly, with a pursed mouth, surveying the young man’s hose, the clinging knee-breeches, the stained red waistcoat, and the shabby green cutaway coat, but more intent upon the dissipation of his shaven boyish countenance, the disorder of his hair, and his reckless eye.

“Tut, tut! It’s no’ a nicht for a cadger’s dog, let alane a powney,” said the amiable host; and then, in a beseeching tone that told the nature of their partnery, “Am I richt or am I wrang, Jennet? At least there maun be an egg or twa.”

The wife scowled at her mate, and said emphatically that eggs were out of the question, and the hour was quite ridiculous.

“I’m no heedin’,” said the stranger; “I had a meal of a kind at Fintry. What I want’s a bed.”

“Ye’ll get that!” cried the landlord heartily, glad to be assured of a speedy return to his own blankets. “There’s a snug bed ben, and ye’ll hae a’ the better appetite for breakfast.”

“But what’s your security?” demanded madam, and the goodman sighed.

Her customer shrugged his shoulders, threw himself in a chair, and thrust his feet out to the fire of turf.

“God,” said he.

“Sir?” she queried.

“I said God was my security,” remarked the stranger.

“Ye couldna hae better!” cried the innkeeper, and drawing a chopin of ale for the pious gentleman, beat down by the very gust of his geniality the rising opposition of the woman’s manner.

Twenty minutes later Black Andy went to bed in the ben. He went with his boots on, for he had, in the very act of stooping to unlace them by the light of a tallow candle, seen that which led at the end to the rout of any thought of sleep. The candle, which he had placed on the floor the better to see his knots untied, threw a beam under a heavy oaken kist in the corner, and glinted on a ring of brass that oddly hung from the bottom of the box. He threw up the lid, to find no more than a pile of homespun blanketing; then turned the kist quietly on its side, to learn that the ring was on the latch of a secret bottom. He opened it: the shallow space between the false bottom and the real one seemed at first

to hold no more than rags; but fumbling through them, he found a leather pouch with three-and-twenty guineas—madam's private hoard! As he counted the money silently on the covering of the bed, the storm that held the Flanders Moss in its possession seemed for the while to hold its breath, as he did his own, so that he could hear the thud of his heart and each reluctant tick of the kitchen clock.

For an hour he lay in darkness, wide awake, with the pouch in his breast. The murmur of voices in the kitchen ceased, its light went out; the lonely inn on the edge of the moor was black, and wholly lost in the privacy of the night.

The innkeeper, easy man! turned his face to the box-bed wall in the kitchen, and counted sheep going through a dip-tank till the fleece of the last of them spread, and spread, and spread, like a magic counterpane, and fell on him at last, smothering him to sleep. It was his goodwife's elbow. For she lay on her back, her hands hollowed behind her ears, her cap-strings loose, and listened for some other sound than the creak of the roof-cabars, the whistle of the thatch, and tempest's all-pervading symphony. Ah! it would have been an easier night for her if she had had some chance to put her money elsewhere; it was her evil star that had surely brought this man to Flanders Moss on a Hogmanay, the very night when all honest bodies ought to be at their own fire-ends!

A sound in the room where he lay brought her sitting up in bed with every sense alert. A sash squeaked: she shook her husband out of the fleece of sleep, and they jumped together to the chamber door. It opened to a gale that blew right through it from an open window: their lodger was gone!

"I kent it!" cried the woman furiously, and shrieked to realise, by a feel of the hand in the dark, that her hoard had been discovered.

"Dod, now, that's droll!" said her husband, scratching his head. "And him had such good security!"

II.

Black Andy, with the pouch of guineas comforting the breast of him like liquor, so that he hardly missed his wrap-rascal or his bonnet that were drying by the kitchen fire, ran along the broken road for Kippen. It was like the bed of a burn, and like a rested monster rose the storm afresh from the Hieland hills. One glance he gave behind him at a step or two from the window whence he burst; so dark was the night that the inn in the womb of it was quite invisible. He looked over his shoulder for a second time, having run for a little, and saw the bobbing of a lanthorn. His amiable host was already on his track, and Kippen was plainly no

place for Black Andy.

With an oath he quitted the road, ran down through a clump of hazel, and launched on the rushy moss that (as the story goes) had once been a part of the sea that threshed on Stirling rock.

Like many another man, this scamp, unskilled in thievery, had no sooner escaped the urgent danger of arrest than he rued his impulsive fall to the temptation of a bag of clinking coins. He had drunk through an idle youth, and others had paid the lawing; he had diced and cheated; he had borrowed and left unpaid; he had sold bad cattle and denied his warrandice; he had lived without labour—all of which is no more different from theft than tipsyness is different from drunkenness. But hitherto he had stopped on the verge of crime denominate, and it was his mother's only glad reflection when the thought of his follies haunted her pillow. Had the temptation of the inn-wife's gold come to him on another night, and elsewhere, he could have turned the broad of his back on it, and mustered conquering hosts of fear and of expedience to his support; the misfortune was that it found him in a desperate hour. For a week he had been in a most jovial company with some Campsie lairds; he had spent the price of his father's horse to the last plack royally, as if he had been a bonnet-laird himself, and New Year's Day should have seen him back at Blaruiskien with the price of the horse, or else it meant disaster. Even that consideration scarcely would have made a thief of him (as he thought now), but for the wife in the Moss of Flanders inn; she had so little deserved to be the sole possessor of such gold. A comely wife, a civil wife, a reasonably hospitable wife (as he argued with himself), might have kept her money on the doorstep, and he would have been the last to meddle with it; but this one deserved some punishment, and he was, in a fashion, Heaven's instrument. The husband—true, he was a kindly soul (and here the instrument of Heaven found his sophistry weak a little at the knees); but Black Andy had an intuition that the hoard was secret, even from the husband, and he guessed aright the wife would never report the actual nature of her loss.

He seemed the more contemptible a thief to himself, because in one particular he had blundered like a fool. For yonder, beiking before the innkeeper's fire, were his wrap-rascal and his bonnet—the first, at least, a clue to his identity. There was not another wrap-rascal than his own in his native parish; the very name of the coat had seemed too sinister for his mother, and the garment made him kenspeckle over half the shire. Though the folk in the inn of the Flanders Moss might never before have cast an eye on him, they had but to hang that garment on a whin-bush at their door to learn his history from scores of passers-by.

Thinking thus—not any penitent in him, but the poltroon that is in all of us at the thought of discovery by the world of what we really are—the woman's money coldly weighed upon his bosom like a divot. By God! a rotten bargain had he made—to swap the easy mind of innocence for three

days' drinking with numskull bonnet-lairds in a Campsie tavern.

But the thing was done, with no remedy; there was nothing for it but to tramp home and meet his obligation to his father.

So busily did his mind engage with these considerations that the increase of the tempest for a little never touched his comprehension. He came to himself with a start at a stumble in a hag whose water almost reached his knees, and realised that he was ignorant of the airt he moved to, and that the passion of the night was like to shake the world in tatters. The very moss below him seemed to quiver like a bog; no rush, no heather shrub, but had its shrieking share in the cacophony of that unco hour upon the curdled spaces of the ancient sea. Black Andy put out his cold-starved hand before his face, and peered for it in vain; it might have been a hand of ebony.

For hours he laboured through that windy desert, airing, as he judged by the wind, for the north, as far away as possible from the inn of his misdoing, and weariness seemed to turn his blood to spring-well water, and his flesh to wool, so that the earthy cushion of the hags in which he sometimes stumbled tempted him to lie and sleep. The last sheuch would have done his business if he had not, sitting on its edge, beheld a glimmer of light from a window. He dragged with an effort towards it, climbed a dry-stone dyke, and felt with his hands along the back of some dwelling which he took for a shepherd's hut, until he came upon the door. Breathlessly he leaned his shoulder to it and loudly rapped.

"First-foot!" he heard a voice exclaim, and remembered it was the New Year's Day as the bolt shot back and he fell in the arms—of the innkeeper!

"Ye're back, my man!" cried the innkeeper's wife, with a face as white as sleet. "It'll be to pay your lodging?"

"Tut, tut! never mind the lawin'. It's the New Year's Day, and here's your dram," said the genial landlord. "But, man, yon was a bonny prank to play on us! We thought ye were awa' wi' the wife's best blankets."

"But a lodgin's aye a lodgin'," said the wife nervously; and Andy laughed, knowing her perturbation.

"Here's the lawin'," he exclaimed, and banged her pouch of guineas in her hand. "Ye'll can count it later, and I'm awa' to my bed again. Were ye really feared I was gaein' to cheat ye?"

It was the innkeeper who answered; his wife was off with her hoardings.

"Not me!" he said. "I kent ye had Grand Security."

A BALE OF BLANKETS

They were holding what was almost a public reception in the ward-room of the *Missalanna*. The Honorable J. J. Flavin, having appeased his hunger and slaked his thirst, signalled the Filipino mess-boy for a smoke; and having decided as to what was the most expensive cigar on the tray, he took two, and moved on to where, through a shining air-port, a fresh sea-breeze might find its cooling way to his beaded brow, for it was a warm summer's day and at trencher-play the Honorable Flavin had been no laggard.

As the Honorable J. J. smoked, so did he take the time to observe; and, observing, he vouchsafed the opinion to a thin-faced, high-shouldered young fellow who happened to halt near him: "These navy fellows must have a fat time of it, huh, Carlin?"

Carlin flashed a glance on Flavin. "How do you figure that?"

"Why, look at the swell feed--and the champagne here to-day. And look!" He slid off for inspection the band of the cigar he was smoking. "I paid three for a dollar for that same cigar the other day at a big hotel in Washin'ton. They must have money to throw overboard to be givin' that kind away."

Carlin knew the brand. He also knew that only two, or it might be three, officers of that ward-room mess could afford to smoke that make of cigar regularly; but he did not tell Flavin that. "They get those cigars for twelve cents apiece--buying 'em by the hundred--in Cuba, J. J.," he suggested mildly.

"And the dealers stick us thirty-five cents for 'em up here! Anyway, a fat time they have swelling 'round in uniforms given 'em by the gover'ment for the ladies to admire 'em."

Two years of political reporting in his home city and two more as Washington correspondent for the paper of most vital circulation in that same home city had not made of Carlin a politician, and it is to be doubted if ten times four years in a political atmosphere would have so made him; because ancestrally implanted in Carlin's breast was an inextinguishable desire to speak what he thought, and usually as soon as he thought it.

He said now--sharply: "What do you know about naval officers or navy life, J. J.?"

The Honorable J. J. Flavin had never, not even when he was only ward leader and therefore much more disposed to humility than now, been able to reconcile Carlin's unworshipful tongue with his own sense of what was due a man of importance in the political world. And Judas priest, he had a tongue of his own if it came to that! "Of course, you know all about it!" he retorted.

"No, I don't," replied Carlin promptly and placidly. "But I probably know more than do you or almost anybody else who has never had the chance to live aboard ship and see some of it. This afternoon the officers of this ship are spreading themselves according to service traditions to give you and me and all aboard here a good time. To-morrow they'll be to sea and on the job, a simple-living, busy crowd--working hard, taking chances, and making no talk about it."

Flavin whoofed a funnel of doubting cigar smoke into the teeth of the air-port breeze. "Taking chances! How? And where?"

"Everywhere. Day and night--battleships, destroyers, in submarines and aeroplanes. Thirty men and officers killed in one turret explosion only last month."

"Taking chances--huh! Foolish chances!"

"Anybody who isn't living to see how long he can live takes a foolish chance once in a while. That turret crew were on the battle-range trying to make big-gun records."

"And did they make 'em?"

"They did. And their seven-inch batteries made 'em, too. Single guns and broadsides at ten thousand five hundred yards."

"I didn't hear about that," growled Flavin.

"No? That's a shame, J. J. The department ought to 've wired you about it."

Flavin eyed Carlin sidewise. No use--he would never change. Would he never get on to himself? Flavin wondered. Carlin ought to have been one of the best-advertised men in his line in the country, as everybody around Washington said, but a fellow liable to hop out any time and bat somebody that could be of use to him over the eye, how could anybody go boosting him?

"They must 'a' treated you pretty well, Carlin?" he hazarded slyly.

"They treated me well--yes," snapped Carlin. "And they're treating you pretty decently now, aren't they?"

"I'd like to see 'em treat me, or any member o' Congress, any other way!"

"A member of Congress--that's right. And as a member of Congress you're drawing down how much, J. J.?"

"Seventy-five hundred a year--and allowances," replied Flavin, looking around the wardroom and not caring particularly who might hear the figures.

"And before you were sent to Washington you never made more than fifteen dollars a week in your life," thought Carlin. Aloud he said, in as gentle a tone as he could on short-order muster: "And did you ever stop to think, J. J., that while you're being paid that seventy-five hundred a year--and allowances--the captain of this ship, with ten or eleven hundred lives and a twelve-million-dollar war-machine to look out for, gets less than five thousand a year--and that only after thirty-odd years of professional study and practice? And that almost all of these other officers you see standing around here will regularly have to go up on the bridge and take full charge of this ship and all on her, and let 'em, some night or day, make a mistake, lose their nerve, or close their eyes for an instant and--bing! All off with the ten or eleven hundred lives, not to mention the twelve-million-dollar plant! And these officers under the captain have had all the way from seven or eight to thirty years of continuous professional study and practice, and yet some of them are getting less than one-third of the money you get."

To which the Honorable J. J. responded blandly: "Well, what of it? Their pay and my pay is fixed by the same gover'nment. If they don't pay more, it's because the people who regulate their pay and my pay think they ain't worth any more."

"Fine!" said Carlin--"seeing that Congress regulates them both!"

"Huh!" Flavin hadn't foreseen that. "Here, you!" he roared to the mess-boy with the tray of cigars; and the little brown boy, with no inclining admiration for stout-waisted, loud-voiced men in splendid new gray trousers and frock coats, but always well drilled, floated himself and his tray respectfully, if not over-hurriedly, across the ward-room deck to Flavin.

"If you worked for me I'd soon learn you to move faster," growled Flavin. He began to paw through the tray. "Where's that cigar I had before? This it?" He read the name on the band. "Yes, that's it. Twelve cents apiece in Cuba, did y' say, Carlin? I wonder couldn't I get somebody to get me some of 'em? Here, ain't you having one?"

"No, I've smoked enough."

"Enough?--and swell smokes like this kind being passed round!" He took two.

Suddenly, smoking anew, Flavin cast a suspicious glance at the newspaper man. "What you getting at, Carlin--trying to drive into me all this talk about the navy? Is it because I'm a member of Congress?"

"I don't know that I've been trying to drive anything into you," retorted Carlin. "But you made a crack about the navy, and after you've been in Washington awhile longer somebody will be sure to tell you that my favorite monologue is the navy. They'll probably tell you, too, that if I couldn't get anything more intelligent to listen I'd hold up a row of trolley-poles and pump it into 'em. And so long as we are at it--take the officers' case again. As a member of Congress, J. J., you ought to know these things. When from out of his pay an officer deducts the cost of his grub and uniforms, not to speak of other items----"

"Huh!" Flavin was thinking of a new speech. Its theme was to be the soft times of certain pampered government servants, this for the undistinguished and unterrified voter of his district; but this item of grub and clothes was disturbing. "The gover'nment don't furnish 'em grub and clothes?"

"It doesn't. And the special full-dress coat of that officer standing there, or any of those younger officers, happens to cost nearly one-half of one month's pay--just the coat. And being naval officers, they have to live up to a certain standard aboard ship, as do their families, if they have any, ashore. And a lot of other items. Take this reception this afternoon--they have to pay for it out of their own pockets."

Flavin whoofed two, three funnels of smoke thoughtfully toward the air-port. That speech would sure have to be given up, or vamped up in some new way, or saved for prudent delivery before closed secret organizations--that was sure. An impressive speech, too, he could have made of it. Confound Carlin butting in with his inside information! And Carlin not being a politician either, what could a fellow do with him?

Carlin waited for the words of wisdom to flow. They flowed. "Y' know, Carlin, there's nothing to be gained in my district by voting for any naval bill."

"Is there anything to be lost?"

"Suppose I could swap a vote with somebody for a federal building or

something in my district for something in his district?"

"Go ahead and swap it!" barked Carlin. "And keep on swapping till your district wakes up to you and swaps you for somebody else!"

Flavin shook his head in triumphant prophecy. "They won't--not in my district, Carlin. It's too solid. A nomination is an election in my district, and the machine says who'll be nominated. But I tell you what, Carlin--a man like you in Washin'ton could help me out a lot through your paper up home." He eyed Carlin narrowly to see how he took that. Carlin said nothing. Flavin continued: "You weren't born in the bushes yesterday, Carlin, for all you're no pol. You know enough about the game to know there's nobody giving somethin' for nothing in politics. And----"

Carlin raised a warning palm. "Pull up, pull up! You don't have to do any trading in this thing. You want to remember, J. J., that I'm a newspaper man even before I'm a navy man, and whatever you do you'll get what's coming to you from me."

The Honorable Flavin, not without doubt in his eyes, stared out of the air-port. Presently he said: "I'll take a look over the ship, I guess. See you later."

The eyes of Carlin, searching the ward-room for such officers of the ship as he had not yet greeted, encountered the quizzical and questioning glance of "Sharkey," otherwise Lieutenant Trench, United States Navy. "Who is your large and sonorous friend?" queried Trench. Being a host he did not put it in words, but being human he could not help looking it.

The spoken answer to the unspoken question would probably have horrified the Honorable Flavin. "He's a man from up my way who made himself useful to the machine, and so they sent him to Washington. He's pretty raw, Sharkey, but I suppose he could be worse. At least we know where he will always be found."

"And where, Carl, will he always be found?"

Carlin smiled with Trench. "Where the votes are. That's his idea of supreme political genius--playing for the votes of the moment. I was talking up the navy to him, with an increased navy-pay bill in mind for this session. But I don't suppose that interests you, Sharkey."

"Thanks to the thrift and thoughtfulness of an acquisitive ancestry," smiled Trench, "I suppose I could worry along if there was never a pay-day in the service. But most of the rest of the fellows would surely be interested. There's Pay Totten now. He'd----"

"Where is Pay? I haven't seen him since I came aboard."

"Nor you won't for some time again, unless you carry a longer than regulation glass, for Pay's by this time on the high seas and southward bound. That's why I spoke of him. But come into my room."

From a pigeonhole in his desk in his room Trench pulled out several typewritten pages. "Ever hear, Carl, of Pay's bale of blankets?"

"Nope."

"Ah-h--yours shall be the joy of hearing the tale from the lips of the poet-author himself. You may elevate your high literary eyebrows at the construction, but recalling that you, or some other competent critic, told me once that construction was, after all, subordinate--that is, physical, not psychological, construction--I venture to tell this story in my own way. Hark, now!" He smoothed out his sheets of paper and read:

"She was the war-ship _Missalanna_, which lay out in the stream
Of a port in Chinese waters which translated means Cold Cream.
A wireless comes from the admiral--he flew two stars on blue--
And the message read: 'At once cast free and join me in Chee Foo.
But bring along all packages, all bundles, and all mail
Our need is great, the fleet does wait, come forced draft, do not fail.'

"And says the _Missalanna's_ commander: 'Whatever shall I do?
'Tis a two days' Chinese holiday, don't they know that in Chee Foo?
And a thousand tons of coal we'll need, and merchandise in dock
Fills half the tin-clad warehouse, and immovable as rock
Are sampan men and coolies when they've knocked off for the day--
And now 'tis snow and hail and sleet and a two days' holiday!'
"But he wakes up good old Totten
Sleeping soundly in his bed,
And showing the admiral's wireless,
Mutters: 'This is what he said.'"

Trench looked over the top of his first page. "How's it so far, Carl?"

"They've put men in the brig for less. But go ahead."

"Thanks. I proceed:

"'I was dreaming,' says good old Totten, 'I was writing to my wife
Of Chinese native customs and the joys of navy life.
But two hundred coolie men we'll need and a score of sampans wide
To get that coal aboard the ship and sail by morning tide.

No night for honest men to roam, but be sure ashore I'll go--
Mayhap in a shack on the water-side I'll find my friend Jim Joe.'

"Pay found his old-time Chinese friend and tells him what's to do.
'A thousand tons of coal I want and I'm putting it up to you.'
But Joe he looks at his Melican flend and he says: 'Me no can do--
To-night good Chinese mens they go and burn the joss-sticks--so--
And bad Chinese mens, my flend,' says Joe, with a wink or two,
'They play fan-a-tan, low-lee and mot.' Says Joe: 'Me no can do.'

"And saying the last part over again--
With another wink or two,
'They play fan-a-tan, low-lee and mot.'
Says Joe: 'Me no can do.'

"Then Pay, with a grip of Joe's pigtail, 'You mind the time--you do?--
When I pulled you out from a gunboat's snout?--and you now say: "No can do"?
Two hundred coolie boys I want and twenty sampans wide,
And twice five hundred tons aboard, so we sail by morning tide.
When I left the ship the skipper says: "Now, Pay, it's up to you!"
Pay gives Joe's tail a gentle twitch--'Now, Joe, you must can do!'

"And Joe, with queue curled all anew, in the sleet and hail he goes
And twoscore crews of coolie boys he drags out by their toes.
'Two hunded coolie boys me want and twenty sampans wide,
And tice fi' hunded tlons on ship so she sail by morning tlide.'
And some he tore from their honest beds and some from loud wassail,
But all came out, for Joe was stout, into the sleet and hail.

"And two hundred lusty coolie boys
With twenty sampans wide,
Laid twice five hundred tons to where
The ship in stream did ride."

Trench laid down the sheets.

"That's not the end, Sharkey?"

"No, no. But that's the end of the Jim Joe part, which was hailed as
so masterly a performance on Pay's part--getting those sampan men and
coolies out of their beds on a night like that and to work at coaling
ship for us--that I, the uncrowned poet laureate of the Asiatic
squadron, was commissioned to do it in verse, which I proceeded to do
one night; and got that far, swinging along fine and dandy, when the
messenger called me for the mid-watch."

"And you never finished it?"

"I couldn't--not in rhyme. After that four hours' night-watch the rhymes were all gone from me. It was a rough night. A monsoon made out of the southeast----"

"Omit the professional jargon, Sharkey, and your professional troubles, and remember the first law of story-telling is to tell the story."

"Wizz!" murmured Sharkey. "But, thus encouraged, I proceed. Well, getting Jim Joe started with his twenty sampans and his two hundred coolies was only part of Pay's job that night. The big warehouse, where goods for our fleet and other craft were stored, was in charge of a Chinaman we called Hoo Ling, and he knew less English than Joe, and appreciated even less than Joe the need of quick action. The admiral's wireless message looked just like any other wireless message to this big chink, Hoo Ling. But it's a great thing to be a student of the Chinese and of Chinese customs and of Chinese mental processes. Pay wheedled Ling a little, bluffed him a little, touched on past friendships a little, on possible future business a lot, painted a picture of our warlike forces over to Chee Foo, touched--not too casually--on the so much greater love which the officers and men of the United States Navy bore for China than for Japan, and such other little subtleties as he could invoke or invent. At last the old fellow was moved to open up and let Pay pick out what packages were for the fleet.

"And so, with four yeomen of the ship roused from restful hammocks to make memoranda of the addresses as fast as he pried them loose from the main pile and called them out, and with twelve able seamen of the watch to hustle the packages along as fast as the yeomen recorded them, and with forty other bustling bluejackets to load them into the boats, Pay tore into that pile of freight, which was about as high and twice as long and wide as a three-apartment house. There were probably four or five thousand packages of various kinds to be overhauled, and they were addressed in four languages--English, German, French, and Chinese. If Pay was the only white man in that part of China who could have charmed that impassive old storekeeper out of his bamboo bed that time of night, he was probably likewise the only white man in port that night who could read those Chinese shopkeepers' addresses.

"Dry goods, wet goods, hardware, grocery stuff, butcher's stuff, jeweller's stuff, ship's stores, bales of cotton, bales of silk, curios, souvenirs, bicycles, sewing-machines, sacks of rice, sacks of coffee, sacks of potatoes, barrels of flour and of gasoline, auto tires, boxes of tea, quarters of beef and of mutton, cases of breakfast-food and of oil, packages all the way from the size of a finger-ring to packages the size of an auto-truck. You know what a big, husky chap Pay Totten is? Imagine him on a slushy, snowy night, stripped to the waist, wading into that pile--feet, shoulders, knees, hands, elbows, with his teeth almost-tearing out those packages, and from addresses in English, French, German, and especially Chinese,

picking out flying such as were for our ships."

Trench paused. A reminiscent smile was parting his lips.

"Hurry up. Did you sail on time next morning?" demanded Carlin.

"We did. With our coal aboard and the packages for the fleet, we made a record run and arrived in Chee Foo hours before the admiral was looking for us. And it was the day before Christmas, and our coming made the whole fleet happy for Christmas week, and our skipper got 'Well done!' from the flag-bridge, but--" Trench looked at Carlin and smiled ruefully. "There's so often a but, isn't there, to the otherwise happy tale? Among the seven hundred and odd packages receipted for by Paymaster Totten it seems there was missing one bale of blankets. What happened to the bale of blankets? they queried Paymaster Totten, and 'Lord!' says poor Pay, 'how do I know? It might 've been stolen on the wharf, or dropped overboard between the wharf and one of the ship's boats, or lost in rowing out to the ship or hoisting it over the ship's side. There were a dozen ship's boats and two hundred ship's men coming and going, and half a mile between the ship and shore; and it was a black, blustering night of sleet and hail, and there were also hundreds of coolies and dozens of sampans on the coal. It was drive, drive, drive, from midnight to daylight--how do I know what happened to one lone bale of blankets?"

"However, Pay nor anybody else worried much about the blankets at the time. Our skipper recommended, in view of Paymaster Totten's extraordinary exertions on that night, that the bale of blankets be not charged against his accounts. And the admiral, when he heard all the story, approved and passed it along to Washington. But it came back. And by and by it was sent on to Washington again. And by and by it came back.

"And forth from us it went in due time, and for the last time, we thought, on leaving for home by way of Suez and Guantanamo. In the Mediterranean we picked up the European squadron and with them enjoyed several gala occasions, notably at Alexandria, Naples, Villefranche, and Gibraltar, at each of which ports we deemed it incumbent upon the service to spread itself a little. And during these festivities Pay was there with the rest of us, but between the gala-days going without his bottle of beer with lunch, his cigar after dinner, in order that on the great days he might be able to contribute his share toward these receptions and yet not impair that sum--three-quarters of his pay it was--which he sent home monthly, in order that Mrs. Pay and the five little Pays might have food, lodging, clothes, and otherwise maintain the little social standard of living imposed upon a naval officer's family.

"'Thank God,' says Pay on our last day in the Mediterranean, 'we are

leaving here to-morrow!" and he hauls out his aged special full-dress suit, and looks it over, and says with a sigh: 'I'm afraid I'll have to lay you away, old friend; but a few thrifty months in West India winter quarters and I may be able to replace you with a grand new shining fellow, and so come up the home coast the gayly appparelled, dashing naval officer of tradition.'

"And we went on to the West Indies and put in the rest of the winter there, with Pay forgetting all about the bale of blankets, until the night before we were to go north. On that night a steamer from New York puts into where the fleet is, and in her mail for us is our old friend the letter of the indorsements as to the loss of the blankets, and now with one more indorsement since we'd last seen it, to wit: the department saw no reason to change its original ruling as to the responsibility for the loss of the bale of blankets, and Paymaster Totten's accounts would be charged with the loss thereof."

Trench paused to allow a swift hot blast from Carlin to sweep through the room. "The archaic bureaucrats!" concluded Carlin fervently.

"Yes," agreed Trench, "and yet, Carl, from their point of view----"

"A point of view which impairs high service is criminal."

Trench knitted his brows. "Maybe you're right, Carl, but--recalling your advice about story-telling--Pay Totten, foreseeing a battleship cruise along the North Atlantic coast this summer, with certain pleasant but expensive ports in sight, could see where it might well behoove him to ask for a change of venue--that is, if he ever hoped to settle for that bale of blankets. It was costing him thirty dollars on the ship for his grub, which, as you know, didn't include any smokes or an occasional bottle of beer, nor the laundry for fifteen white suits--a fresh one every day in the tropics--and a few other sundry items, not to mention other minor but inescapable items.

"So Pay thought it all over, and on his way north he put in his request, and two days ago he got his orders; and yesterday he left us. And this morning--look!"--from the pile of letters atop of his desk Trench selected one. "This came. Listen:

"DEAR SHARKEY:

"We're sailing to-day for the West African coast to look into Liberian matters. And in that country, where you're likely any time to fall in with a member of the cabinet sitting barefooted in the middle of the road peeling potatoes, the wear and tear on uniforms won't probably be over-heavy. And if there should happen to be any recherché affairs when we move onto the Congo coast, I am only hoping that the natives

won't inspect too closely any special full-dress paymaster's coat which should be blue but, as it happens, is green in the region of the seams. And after the West African sojourn we are bound for a little jaunt of a thousand miles or so up the Amazon, where I learn--and I've taken some trouble to learn--we won't have to wear full dress at all, not even when calling upon the tribal high chiefs. I'll come home yet with that old full-dress standby--if it isn't blown off my back during some tropical typhoon.

"It's a great thing, Sharkey, the being allowed two months' advance pay on leaving for foreign service. For me it means that Mrs. Totten and the children can have their little place and their one little maid at the little beach which did them all so much good last summer, and, if they're economical, maybe an occasional trip to the movies.

"And so I am leaving almost happy. Of course, the good-by and that two years made me feel a bit lumpy and lonesome leaving them, but the race would be too easy if we didn't carry some little extra weight, wouldn't it? As to the bale----"

Trench looked up. "There's something else, personal stuff, which doesn't concern the story." He laid down the letter and looked up. "I couldn't help hearing a word or two of what your friend the congressman was saying to-day--half the ward-room also heard it, I guess. There's a case for him, Carl, if he's the right kind--a special bill to reimburse Totten."

Carlin jumped to his feet. "You're right, Sharkey. And he isn't the worst in the world. I'll put it up to him right now, if he's still aboard."

Congressman Flavin was still aboard, but also was bursting with something to tell. "What d'y'know, Carlin--nine hundred and odd sailors aboard this ship and not home once in ten years to vote."

"Why----"

"And you ask me to vote for bills for a lot of people that ain't ever home to vote. I wouldn't 'a' known only I was speaking to a couple of 'em happened to live in my district, and they told me."

"That's all right, J. J., but forget that voting stuff for a minute and listen to me." And briefly, rapidly, and not without art, Carlin retold the story--retold it in prose entirely--of Paymaster Totten and the bale of blankets. When he had done he added: "Now, J. J., what do you think of a man doing a good job like that and losing out by it?"

"Always the way, Carlin--always," replied the Honorable Flavin briskly. "What most of these fellows on these ships need is a little course in practical politics. Why didn't that paymaster sit tight in his bunk, the time his captain came to him with that hurry-up message, and tell him he couldn't get any coolies or sampans? If he'd just rolled over in his bunk and said, 'Captain, it can't be done,' or if he'd gone ashore and made a bluff it couldn't be done, he wouldn't 'a' had any bale of blankets to pay for--see? This doing things you don't have to do, and nothing in it for yourself when you do do 'em--that's kid's work."

"All fine, J. J., but how about Christmas for the fleet?"

"Christmas? Let 'em look out for their own Christmas! He'd be getting his pay envelope every week just the same, wouldn't he?"

"Fine again--and as beautifully practical as you always are, J. J. But how about doing what Totten thought was his duty?"

"Duty? That ain't duty--that's foolishness. Duty's doing what you got to do, not doing something just to make a good fellow of yourself."

Slowly Carlin began to count: "One, two, three----"

"What's the matter?" demanded Flavin.

"A dream I had is taking the count--eight, nine, ten, out! Say, Flavin, did it ever occur to you that your duty included knowing something about your business--who can vote, for instance, among a thousand other things, and who can't?"

"The mistake you make and all you wise high-brows make, Carlin"--and the Honorable Flavin fixed him with a knowing eye--"is in thinking I don't know my job. My job ain't in being in Congress. A hell of a lot they'll know at home what I'm doing in Washin'ton after I get there. My job is being elected to Congress. And getting elected means to be able to get votes, and getting votes means being with the people who'll give you the votes. And your paymaster friend"--the Honorable Flavin favored Carlin with a wink and another knowing smile--"and his push, they don't swing any votes. But o' course that's for them. With you it's different. Now, you being in Washin'ton with a string o' newspapers--huh?"

Carlin had walked off.

"There he goes," muttered Flavin, "pluggin' the game of a lot of people who can never do a thing for him."

Trench was shaking his head, half-sadly and half-smilingly, at Carlin. He replaced Totten's letter on the pile on his desk. "One of the jokes of the mess is to accuse me of having so much money that I could publish my own books of foolish rhymes if I felt like it, but I haven't enough to pay for that bale of blankets for Pay Totten. Aboard ship Pay has just as much money as I have. But no matter--I'm one of those who believe that nobody beats the game in the long run. The eternal laws are against it. The people get everybody pretty near right in time. And fellows like Pay will get what's due them some time. And your congressional friend, too, I hope. But"--Trench stood up--"what d'y'say, Carl, if we get out into the ward-room country again? It's been a long watch since you and I clinked glasses together."

And outside, in the mess-room, standing almost under the air-port which opened out to sea, Trench held his glass up to Carlin's, saying: "There was a boson's mate I knew one time, named Cahalan. I used to absorb most of my philosophy from him. I was on the bridge one night, and in one of the wings was Cahalan and another lad of the watch. They were evidently having an argument about something, and Cahalan was trying to convince him. I couldn't hear what his watch-mate said, but from out of the dark all at once I heard Cahalan. Said Cahalan: 'When a man does a good job and gets rated up for it, he's a lucky geezer; when he does a good job and don't get rated up for it, he mayn't be a lucky geezer, but what th' hell, he's done a good job just the same, hasn't he?' So, Carl, what d'y'say?--to Pay Totten, sailing lonesome through the Trades--a poor politician, but a damn good officer!"

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Running Free*, by James B. Connolly

LA LUPA

She was tall and lean; but she had a firm, full bust, and yet she was no longer young; her complexion was brunette, but pallid as if she had always suffered from malaria, and this pallor set forth two big eyes and fresh rosy lips that seemed to eat you.

In the village she was called _la Lupa_ --the She-Wolf--because she was never satisfied. Women made the sign of the cross when they saw her pass, always alone like a big ugly hound, with the vagabond and suspicious gait of a famished wolf; she would bewitch their sons and their husbands in the twinkling of an eye with her red lips and she made them fall in love with her merely by looking at them out of those big Satanic eyes of hers, even if they were before Santa Agrippina's altar.

Fortunately _la Lupa_ never came to church at Easter or at Christmas,

nor to hear Mass or to make confession. _Padre_ Angiolino of Santa Maria di Gesù, a true servant of God, had lost his soul on her account.

Maricchia,--poor girl, pretty and clever she was,--secretly wept because she was _la Lupa's_ daughter, and no one had offered to marry her though she had nice clothes in her bureau, and her own little piece of land in the sun, like every other girl of the village.

One time _la Lupa_ fell in love with a handsome youth who had just served out his time in the army, and had come home and was helping to reap the notary's harvest with her; for surely it means to be in love when she felt the flesh burn under the fustian shift, and on looking at him to experience the thirst that one has in hot June days down in the low-lands.

But he went on with his work, undisturbed, with his nose on his sheaves, and he said to her, "Oh, what's the matter, _gnà_ Pina?"

In the immense fields where the only sound was the rustle of the grasshoppers flying up, while the sun was pouring down his hottest beams perpendicularly, _la Lupa_ was heaping up sheaf on sheaf, and pile on pile, without ever showing any signs of fatigue, without one moment straightening herself up, without once touching her lips to the water jug, so as to stick close to Nanni's heels as he reaped and reaped; and now and again he would ask,--

"What do you want, _gnà_ Pina?"

One evening she told him, it was while the men were sleeping in the threshing-floor, weary of the long day's work and the dogs were howling through the vast black campagna,--

"I want you! you are as handsome as the sun and as sweet as honey; I want you!"

"But I want your daughter--I want the young calf," said Nanni, laughing at his own joke.

La Lupa thrust her hands into the masses of her hair, scratching her temples, without saying a word, and went off and was not seen again in the harvest field. But the following October she saw Nanni again at the time when they were pressing the oil, because he worked near her house, and the rattle of the press kept her awake all night.

"Take a bag of olives," she said to her daughter, "and come with me."

Nanni was shoveling the olives into the hopper and shouting "Ohi" to the mule to keep it going.

"Do you want my daughter Maricchia?" demanded _gnà_ Pina.

"What dowry will you give with your daughter Maricchia?" replied Nanni.

"She has her father's things, and besides I will give her my house; it will be enough for me if you'll let me have a corner in the kitchen to spread out a mattress in."

"If that is so, we can talk about it at Christmas," said Nanni. Nanni was all grease and dirt from the olives put to fermenting, and Maricchia would not have him on any account; but her mother grabbed her by the hair as they stood in front of the hearth and hissed through her set teeth,--

"If you don't take him, I'll kill you."

La Lupa looked ill, and the people remarked: "When the devil was old the devil a monk would be." She no longer went wandering about; she stood no more at her doorway looking out with those eyes as of one possessed.

Her son-in-law, when she fixed those eyes on his face, always began to laugh, and would pull out his cloth talisman, with its effigy of the Madonna, to cross himself with.

Maricchia stayed at home to nurse her children, and her mother went out to work in the fields with the men, just like a man,--to weed, to dig, to guide the animals, to dress the vines, whether it were during the Greek-Levant winds[13] of January, or during the August sirocco, when mules let their heads droop, and men sleep prone on their bellies under the shadow of the North wall.

[13] North-east.

In that time between vespers and nones, when, according to the saying, no good woman is seen going about, _gnà_ Pina was the only living creature to be seen wandering across the campagna, over the fiery hot stones of the narrow streets, among the parched stubble of the wide, wide fields that stretched away into the burning haze toward cloudy Etna, where the sky hangs heavy on the horizon.

"Wake up!" said _la Lupa_ to Nanni, who was asleep in the ditch next the dusty harvest-field, with his head on his arms. "Wake up, for I've brought you some wine to cool your throat."

Nanni opened his eyes, half awake, and saw her sitting up straight and pale before him, with her swelling breast, and her eyes as black as

coal, and drew back waving his arms,--

"No! a good woman does not go about between vespers and nones," groaned Nanni, thrusting his face in amongst the dried weeds of the ditch as far as he could, and putting his fingers into his hair. "Go away! Get you gone! And don't you come to the threshing-floor any more."

She turned and went away,--_la Lupa_,--knotting up her splendid tresses again, looking down steadily as she made her way among the hot stubble, with her eyes black as coal.

But she did go back to the threshing-floor, and Nanni no longer reproached her; and when she failed to come, in that hour between vespers and nones, he went, and with perspiration on his brow, waited for her at the top of the white deserted footpath, but afterwards he would thrust his hands through his hair, and every time he would say, "Go away! Go away! Don't come to the threshing-floor again."

Maricchia wept night and day, and she looked into her mother's face with eyes blazing with tears and jealousy, like a _lupachiotta_, a young wolf herself, every time that she saw her coming back from the fields, silent and pale.

"Vile! _scellerata!_" she would say, "Vile mamma."

"Hold your tongue!"

"Thief! thief!"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I'll go to the _brigadiere_!"[14]

[14] Brigadiere is the station or the Commandant of the detachment of the Carabaneers in a small town.

And she actually went with her infants in her arms, without a sign of fear, and without shedding a tear, like a crazy woman, because now she passionately loved that husband whom she had been forced to marry, greasy and dirty as he was from the olives set to fermenting.

The _brigadiere_ summoned Nanni, and threatened him with the galleys and the gallows. Nanni began to weep, and pull his hair; he denied nothing, did not try to justify himself.

"The temptation was too much," said he, "'twas the temptation of hell." He flung himself at the _brigadiere's_ feet, begging him to send him to the galleys.

"For mercy's sake, _Signor brigadiere_, take me out of this hell! Have me shot! Send me to prison! Don't let me see her ever again! never again!"

"No," replied _la Lupa_, to the _brigadiere's_ question. "I kept a corner of the kitchen to sleep in when I gave him my house as my daughter's dowry. The house is mine. I do not intend to go away."

Shortly after, Nanni was kicked in the chest by a mule, and was like to die; but the priest refused to bring him the Holy Unction unless _la Lupa_ was out of the house.

La Lupa went away, and her son-in-law was then permitted to pass away like a good Christian; he confessed and partook of the Sacrament with such signs of penitence and contrition that all the neighbors and inquisitive visitors wept as they surrounded the dying man's bed.

And it would have been better for him if he had died then and there, before the devil had a chance to return to tempt him, and take possession of him, mind and body, when he got well again.

"Let me be!" he said to _la Lupa_ ; "for mercy's sake, leave me in peace! I have seen death with my own eyes! Poor Maricchia is in despair. Now the whole region knows about it! If I don't see you, it's better for you and better for me."

And he would rather have put his eyes out, than see _la Lupa's_, for when hers were fastened on him, they made him lose soul and body. He did not know what to do to overcome the enchantment. He paid for Masses to be sung for the souls in Purgatory, and he went for aid to the priest and the _brigadiere_. At Easter he went to confession, and as a penance, publicly stood on the flint stones of the holy ground in front of the church, putting out six handbreadths of tongue, and then, when _la Lupa_ returned to tempt him,--

"See here," said he, "don't you come on the threshing-floor again, because if you do come to seek me again, as sure as God exists, I'll kill you."

"All right, kill me!" replied _la Lupa_. "It makes no difference to me; but I can not live without you."

When he saw her afar off coming through the green corn field, he left off pruning the vines, and went and got his axe from the elm.

La Lupa saw him coming to meet her, with his face pale and his eyes rolling wildly, with the axe shining in the sun; but she did not hesitate an instant, did not look away. She went straight forward with

her hands full of bunches of red poppies, and devouring him with those black eyes of hers.

"Ah! a curse on your soul!" stammered Nanni.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Under the Shadow of Etna*, by Giovanni Verga

THE SHOCKS OF DOOM

There is an aristocracy of the public parks and even of the vagabonds who use them for their private apartments. Vallance felt rather than knew this, but when he stepped down out of his world into chaos his feet brought him directly to Madison Square.

Raw and astringent as a schoolgirl--of the old order--young May breathed austere among the budding trees. Vallance buttoned his coat, lighted his last cigarette and took his seat upon a bench. For three minutes he mildly regretted the last hundred of his last thousand that it had cost him when the bicycle cop put an end to his last automobile ride. Then he felt in every pocket and found not a single penny. He had given up his apartment that morning. His furniture had gone toward certain debts. His clothes, save what were upon him, had descended to his man-servant for back wages. As he sat there was not in the whole city for him a bed or a broiled lobster or a street-car fare or a carnation for buttonhole unless he should obtain them by sponging on his friends or by false pretenses. Therefore he had chosen the park.

And all this was because an uncle had disinherited him, and cut down his allowance from liberality to nothing. And all that was because his nephew had disobeyed him concerning a certain girl, who comes not into this story--therefore, all readers who brush their hair toward its roots may be warned to read no further. There was another nephew, of a different branch, who had once been the prospective heir and favorite. Being without grace or hope, he had long ago disappeared in the mire. Now dragnets were out for him; he was to be rehabilitated and restored. And so Vallance fell grandly as Lucifer to the lowest pit, joining the tattered ghosts in the little park.

Sitting there, he leaned far back on the hard bench and laughed a jet of cigarette smoke up to the lowest tree branches. The sudden severing of all his life's ties had brought him a free, thrilling, almost joyous elation. He felt precisely the sensation of the aeronaut when he cuts loose his parachute and lets his balloon drift away.

The hour was nearly ten. Not many loungers were on the benches. The park-dweller, though a stubborn fighter against autumnal coolness, is slow to attack the advance line of spring's chilly cohorts.

Then arose one from a seat near the leaping fountain, and came and sat himself at Vallance's side. He was either young or old; cheap lodging-houses had flavoured him mustily; razors and combs had passed him by; in him drink had been bottled and sealed in the devil's bond. He begged a match, which is the form of introduction among park benchers, and then he began to talk.

"You're not one of the regulars," he said to Vallance. "I know tailored clothes when I see 'em. You just stopped for a moment on your way through the park. Don't mind my talking to you for a while? I've got to be with somebody. I'm afraid--I'm afraid. I've told two or three of those bummers over about it. They think I'm crazy. Say--let me tell you--all I've had to eat to-day was a couple pretzels and an apple. To-morrow I'll stand in line to inherit three millions; and that restaurant you see over there with the autos around it will be too cheap for me to eat in. Don't believe it, do you?"

"Without the slightest trouble," said Vallance, with a laugh. "I lunched there yesterday. To-night I couldn't buy a five-cent cup of coffee."

"You don't look like one of us. Well, I guess those things happen. I used to be a high-flyer myself--some years ago. What knocked you out of the game?"

"I--oh, I lost my job," said Vallance.

"It's undiluted Hades, this city," went on the other. "One day you're eating from china; the next you are eating in China--a chop-suey joint. I've had more than my share of hard luck. For five years I've been little better than a panhandler. I was raised up to live expensively and do nothing. Say--I don't mind telling you--I've got to talk to somebody, you see, because I'm afraid--I'm afraid. My name's Ide. You wouldn't think that old Paulding, one of the millionaires on Riverside Drive, was my uncle, would you? Well, he is. I lived in his house once, and had all the money I wanted. Say, haven't you got the price of a couple of drinks about you--er--what's your name--"

"Dawson," said Vallance. "No; I'm sorry to say that I'm all in, financially."

"I've been living for a week in a coal cellar on Division Street,"

went on Ide, "with a crook they called 'Blinky' Morris. I didn't have anywhere else to go. While I was out to-day a chap with some papers in his pocket was there, asking for me. I didn't know but what he was a fly cop, so I didn't go around again till after dark. There was a letter there he had left for me. Say--Dawson, it was from a big downtown lawyer, Mead. I've seen his sign on Ann Street. Paulding wants me to play the prodigal nephew--wants me to come back and be his heir again and blow in his money. I'm to call at the lawyer's office at ten to-morrow and step into my old shoes again--heir to three million, Dawson, and \$10,000 a year pocket money. And--I'm afraid--I'm afraid."

The vagrant leaped to his feet and raised both trembling arms above his head. He caught his breath and moaned hysterically.

Vallance seized his arm and forced him back to the bench.

"Be quiet!" he commanded, with something like disgust in his tones. "One would think you had lost a fortune, instead of being about to acquire one. Of what are you afraid?"

Ide cowered and shivered on the bench. He clung to Vallance's sleeve, and even in the dim glow of the Broadway lights the latest disinherited one could see drops on the other's brow wrung out by some strange terror.

"Why, I'm afraid something will happen to me before morning. I don't know what--something to keep me from coming into that money. I'm afraid a tree will fall on me--I'm afraid a cab will run over me, or a stone drop on me from a housetop, or something. I never was afraid before. I've sat in this park a hundred nights as calm as a graven image without knowing where my breakfast was to come from. But now it's different. I love money, Dawson--I'm happy as a god when it's trickling through my fingers, and people are bowing to me, with the music and the flowers and fine clothes all around. As long as I knew I was out of the game I didn't mind. I was even happy sitting here ragged and hungry, listening to the fountain jump and watching the carriages go up the avenue. But it's in reach of my hand again now--almost--and I can't stand it to wait twelve hours, Dawson--I can't stand it. There are fifty things that could happen to me--I could go blind--I might be attacked with heart disease--the world might come to an end before I could--"

Ide sprang to his feet again, with a shriek. People stirred on the benches and began to look. Vallance took his arm.

"Come and walk," he said, soothingly. "And try to calm yourself. There is no need to become excited or alarmed. Nothing is going to happen to you. One night is like another."

"That's right," said Ide. "Stay with me, Dawson--that's a good fellow. Walk around with me awhile. I never went to pieces like this before, and I've had a good many hard knocks. Do you think you could hustle something in the way of a little lunch, old man? I'm afraid my nerve's too far gone to try any panhandling."

Vallance led his companion up almost deserted Fifth Avenue, and then westward along the Thirties toward Broadway. "Wait here a few minutes," he said, leaving Ide in a quiet and shadowed spot. He entered a familiar hotel, and strolled toward the bar quite in his old assured way.

"There's a poor devil outside, Jimmy," he said to the bartender, "who says he's hungry and looks it. You know what they do when you give them money. Fix up a sandwich or two for him; and I'll see that he doesn't throw it away."

"Certainly, Mr. Vallance," said the bartender. "They ain't all fakes. Don't like to see anybody go hungry."

He folded a liberal supply of the free lunch into a napkin. Vallance went with it and joined his companion. Ide pounced upon the food ravenously. "I haven't had any free lunch as good as this in a year," he said. "Aren't you going to eat any, Dawson?"

"I'm not hungry--thanks," said Vallance.

"We'll go back to the Square," said Ide. "The cops won't bother us there. I'll roll up the rest of this ham and stuff for our breakfast. I won't eat any more; I'm afraid I'll get sick. Suppose I'd die of cramps or something to-night, and never get to touch that money again! It's eleven hours yet till time to see that lawyer. You won't leave me, will you, Dawson? I'm afraid something might happen. You haven't any place to go, have you?"

"No," said Vallance, "nowhere to-night. I'll have a bench with you."

"You take it cool," said Ide, "if you've told it to me straight. I should think a man put on the bum from a good job just in one day would be tearing his hair."

"I believe I've already remarked," said Vallance, laughing, "that I would have thought that a man who was expecting to come into a fortune on the next day would be feeling pretty easy and quiet."

"It's funny business," philosophized Ide, "about the way people take things, anyhow. Here's your bench, Dawson, right next to mine. The light don't shine in your eyes here. Say, Dawson, I'll get the old

man to give you a letter to somebody about a job when I get back home. You've helped me a lot to-night. I don't believe I could have gone through the night if I hadn't struck you."

"Thank you," said Vallance. "Do you lie down or sit up on these when you sleep?"

For hours Vallance gazed almost without winking at the stars through the branches of the trees and listened to the sharp slapping of horses' hoofs on the sea of asphalt to the south. His mind was active, but his feelings were dormant. Every emotion seemed to have been eradicated. He felt no regrets, no fears, no pain or discomfort. Even when he thought of the girl, it was as of an inhabitant of one of those remote stars at which he gazed. He remembered the absurd antics of his companion and laughed softly, yet without a feeling of mirth. Soon the daily army of milk wagons made of the city a roaring drum to which they marched. Vallance fell asleep on his comfortless bench.

At ten o'clock on the next day the two stood at the door of Lawyer Mead's office in Ann Street.

Ide's nerves fluttered worse than ever when the hour approached; and Vallance could not decide to leave him a possible prey to the dangers he dreaded.

When they entered the office, Lawyer Mead looked at them wonderingly. He and Vallance were old friends. After his greeting, he turned to Ide, who stood with white face and trembling limbs before the expected crisis.

"I sent a second letter to your address last night, Mr. Ide," he said. "I learned this morning that you were not there to receive it. It will inform you that Mr. Paulding has reconsidered his offer to take you back into favor. He has decided not to do so, and desires you to understand that no change will be made in the relations existing between you and him."

Ide's trembling suddenly ceased. The color came back to his face, and he straightened his back. His jaw went forward half an inch, and a gleam came into his eye. He pushed back his battered hat with one hand, and extended the other, with levelled fingers, toward the lawyer. He took a long breath and then laughed sardonically.

"Tell old Paulding he may go to the devil," he said, loudly and clearly, and turned and walked out of the office with a firm and lively step.

Lawyer Mead turned on his heel to Vallance and smiled.

"I am glad you came in," he said, genially. "Your uncle wants you to return home at once. He is reconciled to the situation that led to his hasty action, and desires to say that all will be as--"

"Hey, Adams!" cried Lawyer Mead, breaking his sentence, and calling to his clerk. "Bring a glass of water--Mr. Vallance has fainted."

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *The Voice of the City*, by O. Henry

ON THE RIVER

I rented a little country house last summer on the banks of the Seine, several leagues from Paris, and went out there to sleep every evening. After a few days I made the acquaintance of one of my neighbors, a man between thirty and forty, who certainly was the most curious specimen I ever met. He was an old boating man, and crazy about boating. He was always beside the water, on the water, or in the water. He must have been born in a boat, and he will certainly die in a boat at the last.

One evening as we were walking along the banks of the Seine I asked him to tell me some stories about his life on the water. The good man at once became animated, his whole expression changed, he became eloquent, almost poetical. There was in his heart one great passion, an absorbing, irresistible passion--the river.

Ah, he said to me, how many memories I have, connected with that river that you see flowing beside us! You people who live in streets know nothing about the river. But listen to a fisherman as he mentions the word. To him it is a mysterious thing, profound, unknown, a land of mirages and phantasmagoria, where one sees by night things that do not exist, hears sounds that one does not recognize, trembles without knowing why, as in passing through a cemetery--and it is, in fact, the most sinister of cemeteries, one in which one has no tomb.

The land seems limited to the river boatman, and on dark nights, when there is no moon, the river seems limitless. A sailor has not the same feeling for the sea. It is often remorseless and cruel, it is true; but it shrieks, it roars, it is honest, the great sea; while the river is silent and perfidious. It does not speak, it flows along without a sound; and this eternal motion of flowing water is more terrible to me than the high waves of the ocean.

Dreamers maintain that the sea hides in its bosom vast tracts of blue where those who are drowned roam among the big fishes, amid strange forests and crystal grottoes. The river has only black depths where one

rots in the slime. It is beautiful, however, when it sparkles in the light of the rising sun and gently laps its banks covered with whispering reeds.

The poet says, speaking of the ocean,

“O waves, what mournful tragedies ye know
--Deep waves, the dread of kneeling mothers' hearts!
Ye tell them to each other as ye roll
On flowing tide, and this it is that gives
The sad despairing tones unto your voice
As on ye roll at eve by mounting tide.”

Well, I think that the stories whispered by the slender reeds, with their little soft voices, must be more sinister than the lugubrious tragedies told by the roaring of the waves.

But as you have asked for some of my recollections, I will tell you of a singular adventure that happened to me ten years ago.

I was living, as I am now, in Mother Lafon's house, and one of my closest friends, Louis Bernet who has now given up boating, his low shoes and his bare neck, to go into the Supreme Court, was living in the village of C., two leagues further down the river. We dined together every day, sometimes at his house, sometimes at mine.

One evening as I was coming home along and was pretty tired, rowing with difficulty my big boat, a twelve-footer, which I always took out at night, I stopped a few moments to draw breath near the reed-covered point yonder, about two hundred metres from the railway bridge.

It was a magnificent night, the moon shone brightly, the river gleamed, the air was calm and soft. This peacefulness tempted me. I thought to myself that it would be pleasant to smoke a pipe in this spot. I took up my anchor and cast it into the river.

The boat floated downstream with the current, to the end of the chain, and then stopped, and I seated myself in the stern on my sheepskin and made myself as comfortable as possible. There was not a sound to be heard, except that I occasionally thought I could perceive an almost imperceptible lapping of the water against the bank, and I noticed taller groups of reeds which assumed strange shapes and seemed, at times, to move.

The river was perfectly calm, but I felt myself affected by the unusual silence that surrounded me. All the creatures, frogs and toads, those nocturnal singers of the marsh, were silent.

Suddenly a frog croaked to my right, and close beside me. I shuddered. It

ceased, and I heard nothing more, and resolved to smoke, to soothe my mind. But, although I was a noted colorer of pipes, I could not smoke; at the second draw I was nauseated, and gave up trying. I began to sing. The sound of my voice was distressing to me. So I lay still, but presently the slight motion of the boat disturbed me. It seemed to me as if she were making huge lurches, from bank to bank of the river, touching each bank alternately. Then I felt as though an invisible force, or being, were drawing her to the surface of the water and lifting her out, to let her fall again. I was tossed about as in a tempest. I heard noises around me. I sprang to my feet with a single bound. The water was glistening, all was calm.

I saw that my nerves were somewhat shaky, and I resolved to leave the spot. I pulled the anchor chain, the boat began to move; then I felt a resistance. I pulled harder, the anchor did not come up; it had caught on something at the bottom of the river and I could not raise it. I began pulling again, but all in vain. Then, with my oars, I turned the boat with its head up stream to change the position of the anchor. It was no use, it was still caught. I flew into a rage and shook the chain furiously. Nothing budged. I sat down, disheartened, and began to reflect on my situation. I could not dream of breaking this chain, or detaching it from the boat, for it was massive and was riveted at the bows to a piece of wood as thick as my arm. However, as the weather was so fine I thought that it probably would not be long before some fisherman came to my aid. My ill-luck had quieted me. I sat down and was able, at length, to smoke my pipe. I had a bottle of rum; I drank two or three glasses, and was able to laugh at the situation. It was very warm; so that, if need be, I could sleep out under the stars without any great harm.

All at once there was a little knock at the side of the boat. I gave a start, and a cold sweat broke out all over me. The noise was, doubtless, caused by some piece of wood borne along by the current, but that was enough, and I again became a prey to a strange nervous agitation. I seized the chain and tensed my muscles in a desperate effort. The anchor held firm. I sat down again, exhausted.

The river had slowly become enveloped in a thick white fog which lay close to the water, so that when I stood up I could see neither the river, nor my feet, nor my boat; but could perceive only the tops of the reeds, and farther off in the distance the plain, lying white in the moonlight, with big black patches rising up from it towards the sky, which were formed by groups of Italian poplars. I was as if buried to the waist in a cloud of cotton of singular whiteness, and all sorts of strange fancies came into my mind. I thought that someone was trying to climb into my boat which I could no longer distinguish, and that the river, hidden by the thick fog, was full of strange creatures which were swimming all around me. I felt horribly uncomfortable, my forehead felt as if it had a tight band round it, my heart beat so that it almost suffocated me, and, almost beside myself, I thought of swimming away from

the place. But then, again, the very idea made me tremble with fear. I saw myself, lost, going by guesswork in this heavy fog, struggling about amid the grasses and reeds which I could not escape, my breath rattling with fear, neither seeing the bank, nor finding my boat; and it seemed as if I would feel myself dragged down by the feet to the bottom of these black waters.

In fact, as I should have had to ascend the stream at least five hundred metres before finding a spot free from grasses and rushes where I could land, there were nine chances to one that I could not find my way in the fog and that I should drown, no matter how well I could swim.

I tried to reason with myself. My will made me resolve not to be afraid, but there was something in me besides my will, and that other thing was afraid. I asked myself what there was to be afraid of. My brave “ego” ridiculed my coward “ego,” and never did I realize, as on that day, the existence in us of two rival personalities, one desiring a thing, the other resisting, and each winning the day in turn.

This stupid, inexplicable fear increased, and became terror. I remained motionless, my eyes staring, my ears on the stretch with expectation. Of what? I did not know, but it must be something terrible. I believe if it had occurred to a fish to jump out of the water, as often happens, nothing more would have been required to make me fall over, stiff and unconscious.

However, by a violent effort I succeeded in becoming almost rational again. I took up my bottle of rum and took several pulls. Then an idea came to me, and I began to shout with all my might towards all the points of the compass in succession. When my throat was absolutely paralyzed I listened. A dog was howling, at a great distance.

I drank some more rum and stretched myself out at the bottom of the boat. I remained there about an hour, perhaps two, not sleeping, my eyes wide open, with nightmares all about me. I did not dare to rise, and yet I intensely longed to do so. I delayed it from moment to moment. I said to myself: “Come, get up!” and I was afraid to move. At last I raised myself with infinite caution as though my life depended on the slightest sound that I might make; and looked over the edge of the boat. I was dazzled by the most marvellous, the most astonishing sight that it is possible to see. It was one of those phantasmagoria of fairyland, one of those sights described by travellers on their return from distant lands, whom we listen to without believing.

The fog which, two hours before, had floated on the water, had gradually cleared off and massed on the banks, leaving the river absolutely clear; while it formed on either bank an uninterrupted wall six or seven metres high, which shone in the moonlight with the dazzling brilliance of snow. One saw nothing but the river gleaming with light between these two white

mountains; and high above my head sailed the great full moon, in the midst of a bluish, milky sky.

All the creatures in the water were awake. The frogs croaked furiously, while every few moments I heard, first to the right and then to the left, the abrupt, monotonous and mournful metallic note of the bullfrogs. Strange to say, I was no longer afraid. I was in the midst of such an unusual landscape that the most remarkable things would not have astonished me.

How long this lasted I do not know, for I ended by falling asleep. When I opened my eyes the moon had gone down and the sky was full of clouds. The water lapped mournfully, the wind was blowing, it was pitch dark. I drank the rest of the rum, then listened, while I trembled, to the rustling of the reeds and the foreboding sound of the river. I tried to see, but could not distinguish my boat, nor even my hands, which I held up close to my eyes.

Little by little, however, the blackness became less intense. All at once I thought I noticed a shadow gliding past, quite near me. I shouted, a voice replied; it was a fisherman. I called him; he came near and I told him of my ill-luck. He rowed his boat alongside of mine and, together, we pulled at the anchor chain. The anchor did not move. Day came, gloomy gray, rainy and cold, one of those days that bring one sorrows and misfortunes. I saw another boat. We hailed it. The man on board of her joined his efforts to ours, and gradually the anchor yielded. It rose, but slowly, slowly, loaded down by a considerable weight. At length we perceived a black mass and we drew it on board. It was the corpse of an old woman with a big stone round her neck.

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